Team GoGetters: Beyond the First Gate

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Summary: I recently watched the first Pokemon Mystery Dungeon special again, and thought about trying to continue it. Team Go-Getters continue their work, but they may be in for more than they bargained for. Follows the game storyline with some later differences.

1. Crisis in Tiny Woods

A bright afternoon sun was shining down on a small forest to the northwest of the small village known as Pokémon Square. Near the entrance to this forest, a small, blue turtle Pokémon known as a Squirtle wearing a Pecha Scarf seemed to be looking for something.

"I hope I can find some supplies to replace the ones we lost earlier today," he mused to himself, "since Ekans sure had a big appetite, and Chikorita worked really hard to gather up all those berries."

This Squirtle happened to be the newest addition to Team Go-Getters, having just joined the same morning. Despite the nagging detail that he used to be a human, he still decided to stick with Charmander and Chikorita, and ended up helping them succeed in their mission to rescue Big Brother Pikachu. Following this, they had taken on some smaller jobs to help out Pokémon in some of the smaller areas during the morning, and now were taking a short break before getting back to work. While Charmander and Chikorita were mingling back at the village, Squirtle volunteered to go restock the toolbox. They agreed and pointed him to the northwest to search the woods there.

Ten minutes later, he arrived and began his search. As he walked, he remembered that this was where he had woken up originally, though he couldn't recall how he ended up at Team Go-Getters base. While he searched, he began to ponder a few of the mysteries in his head.

"_I don't understand._" he thought as he adjusted his scarf, "_How did I turn into a Pokémon and wind up in this forest? And why can't I remember anything beyond the fact that I'm really a human? I mean, it feels like the answer should be in front of me, and yet I can't see it._"

However, a loud shout jerked him out of these thoughts.

"HELP! Someone please help me!"

Squirtle jumped up in surprise, having been yanked out of his thoughts so suddenly. After taking a moment to calm down, he looked around for the source of the voice. He found it just up ahead of where he was; it was Big Brother Pikachu, and it looked like he had a big problem on his hands!

"Hey! Pikachu, what's the matter?" called Squirtle. Pikachu recognized the voice and turned to see Squirtle.

"Oh man, it's good to see you again Squirtle! I really need some help now! Are your other team members with you?" asked Pikachu.

"No, just me right now," responded Squirtle. "What's going on?"

"Okay, here's what happened," Pikachu began to explain, calming down a little. "After you guys left for the Pelipper Post Office, Pichu and I decided to come out here and spend some time playing after we went home for a while. A little while ago, we came across a huge fissure just up ahead when a sudden strong wind blew through the forest! I grabbed a nearby tree and tried to hold onto Pichu, but he lost his grip and fell in!"

"WHAT?! That's awful!" exclaimed Squirtle. "Is he okay?!?"

"When I went to go help him, he didn't get hurt from the looks of it, but when I got in the fissure, the Pokémon there attacked me. I think that earthquake earlier this morning caused the fissure to open and now the Pokémon living in the forest have grown outraged because of it," explained Pikachu. "I couldn't handle them all, so I got out before they could send my head flying and started looking for some help. Please, I really need some help Squirtle; there's no telling what the Pokemon will do to my little brother!"

"Okay, I'll help you rescue Pichu," Squirtle responded. "Like you said, there's no telling what'll happen to him, and it'll take at least ten minutes to get back to the village. But between the two of us, we should be able to handle it."

Pikachu looked at him for a moment, then jumped toward him waving his arms saying "THANK YOU SO MUCH!" Squirtle sweat dropped at this, but

smiled, glad that he could help Pikachu rescue Pichu. After Pikachu was done thanking him, the two then headed to the west to get to the Tiny Woods area.

5 minutes later…

Squirtle and Pikachu arrived and began to search the woods for Pichu. Walking side by side, they kept a sharp lookout for any sign of Pichu. Squirtle was the first to speak up.

"Why do they call this place Tiny Woods, anyway?" he asked.

"It's called that because it's one of the smallest forests in the area," Pikachu explained. "Oh," said Squirtle. As they continued on their way, they suddenly saw a bunch of Sunkern huddled together along the path they were walking.

"Excuse me, Sunkern, have any of you seen a Pichu come by here?" asked Pikachu. Despite Pikachu clearly asking them, the Sunkern didn't seem to pay him any mind.

"Um, excuse me…" Pikachu tried again, starting to feel a little nervous, as was Squirtle at how the Sunkern were acting. Suddenly, their eyes narrowed into scowls and they leapt forward to attack, with Pikachu and Squirtle just barely dodging them!

"_What did we do_?" wondered Squirtle. The Sunkern looked at them and prepared to attack again.

"Looks like we'll have to fight our way past them!" said Squirtle. "Right, let's send these little sprouts flying!" agreed Pikachu. The two ran towards the charging Sunkern swarm.

"Tackle attack, go!" called Squirtle as he charged forward, knocking down several Sunkern with a single hit.

"Quick attack!" yelled Pikachu, also pushing through a few Sunkern with his speed. The two pals smiled at each other after they had landed, then got ready to deal with the rest of the Sunkern.

"Water gun!" yelled Squirtle, pushing three Sunkern back into two others and knocking them all out.

"Thundershock!" yelled Pikachu, giving a shock to the five Sunkern coming at him from above and sending them back into another five. The last Sunkern looked at Squirtle and Pikachu, then glanced to the sides a few times before hopping away. The two partners did a fist bump.

"Now, let's go find your brother!" Squirtle said to Pikachu, who nodded and then they both began walking through the forest again.

Later on, after running into some Wurmple that tried to tie up Squirtle, an Exeggute whose Confusion gave Pikachu a real headache, and Squirtle picking up some berries and apples for the toolbox, they began to hear

the sound of crying and rushed towards it. In the small rocky area, they saw Pichu crying against a rock and looking tired, as if he had used his electricity too much.

"Hey, Pichu!" called Pikachu as he and Squirtle got closer. Pichu stopped crying when he heard Pikachu's voice.

"B-Big Brother? Squirtle?" asked Pichu, and was answered by nods from both. Before they could get to him, he spotted something approaching and shouted, "LOOK OUT!!"

Unfortunately, the two couldn't react in time and were clipped from behind by a Wing Attack! After they recovered enough to look up, the saw that they had been attacked by a Fearow that sure looked like it was desperate for some food!

"Back off, pipsqueaks! Unless you want to end up as part of my lunch, too!" the Fearow threatened. "This little pest may have given me a few jolts, but now he's nothing but food! So leave, before you end up the same!"

As the Fearow said all this, Pikachu was beginning to get angry and growled "NOBODY IS GOING TO EAT MY LITTLE BROTHER!" He then took off in an Agility attack and grabbed Pichu and brought him back before the Fearow could react. Once they were both back, Squirtle gave him one of the Oran Berries the two had picked up along the way so Pichu would be able to get to safety if he had to.

The Fearow just grinned at this and said, "I wasn't expecting to get such a big meal today, but I certainly have no problem with it! No one steals my food and gets off easy!"

"Quick, Pichu, go hide behind that rock while Pikachu and I try to stop this guy," Squirtle whispered while pointing to one of the large rocks behind them. Pichu nodded and quickly dashed off while Pikachu and Squirtle got ready to battle.

As the battle began, Fearow started off by launching a Fury Attack at the two, Pikachu being able to jump out of the way, while Squirtle escaped into his shell with a Withdraw to avoid most of the damage. Pikachu asked Squirtle if he was okay, which he said he was, before attempting to counterattack. Squirtle launched a Tackle attack while Pikachu attacked with a Slam, but both failed to do much to Fearow. Fearow then attacked with Mirror Move, which copied Pikachu's Slam, using his bigger body to push the two back. They decided to keep their distance and Squirtle attacked with a Water Gun, with Pikachu following with a Thundershock. They seemed to do a fair amount of damage, but Fearow suddenly swooped up and then began to head back at them.

"Now what?!" exclaimed Squirtle.

"Oh man, that looks like a…" before he finishes, the two are hit hard by the attack, causing Pichu to gasp in horror. "…Aerial Ace!"

Fearow glanced down at them and smirked as they struggled to stand, "Give it up. You can't beat me, just face it. Hand over the Pichu and I may let you two go."

Squirtle just grinned and said, "You think we're just gonna hand Pichu over to you? And give up on this tough battle? No way, we're gonna stand and fight for Pichu since he's like a brother to both of us. After all, we're Pokémon and we all have to look out for each other like a family, even if we're not alike. So get ready, Fearow, 'cause we're gonna beat that beak of yours into the ground!"

While Fearow just laughed at what he called "sentimental drivel poop" both Pikachu and Pichu were moved by what Squirtle had said. Pikachu summoned the strength to stand up without wobbling, while Pichu came out from his hiding spot to help Squirtle stand up. After they both stood up, a feeling spread through the both of them that made them feel stronger. "I think I might've leveled up," said Squirtle. "I think I just did too," agreed Pikachu. He then looked down at Pichu and said, "But you'd better go back and hide, Pichu."

Pichu glanced down and shook his head at this. "No, Big Brother," Pichu started, "Squirtle's totally right. It's time I pitched and helped you stop him as well." He then looked up at Squirtle and said, "I'm done being afraid. I'll help you stop him too." After a moment of hesitation, Squirtle and Pikachu both agreed to let Pichu help.

"Excuse me, aren't you forgetting someone?" the Fearow angrily cawed. "If you're all just going to ignore me, THEN I"LL JUST FINISH YOU RIGHT NOW!!" He then took off to attack with another Fury Attack, but the team of three was ready for him. Squirtle suddenly leapt forward and unleashed his new attack.

"Take this! Bite attack!" He opened his mouth and brought his teeth down near Fearow's wing, causing the bird to halt his attack from the shock and it also caused him to cringe. After Squirtle backed off, Pikachu launched his attack.

"Thunderbolt!" He then blasted Fearow was a jolt of lightning that was even more powerful than his earlier Thundershock. Suddenly, an idea occurred to Squirtle.

"Hey, I have a plan to beat Fearow," he said. While Fearow recovered from the electric onslaught, Squirtle whispered his plan to Pikachu and Pichu. As Fearow finally snapped back to normal, they all nodded and turned to face him. Pichu dashed forward as if he was going to attack head-on.

"Looks like I'll have my appetizer early!" Fearow growled. However, as Fearow was about to snap Pichu up in his beak, he suddenly spun in midair and landed of Fearow's back! Suddenly, his Static ability went into effect and left Fearow once again paralyzed. Pichu quickly jumped off and Squirtle made his move.

"Tackle attack!" Squirtle launched his attack against Fearow, knocking the bird and giving it a rough landing, while Squirtle pushed off and

landed away from Fearow while it struggled to move. At this, Pikachu jumped past Squirtle and attacked!

"Thunderbolt!" Another strong jolt of electricity went flying at Fearow and pushed him back farther, as well as making him more paralyzed. Once the bolt ended, Pichu prepared for the final hit.

"This is for scaring me and trying to eat me! VOLT TACKLE!" Pichu took off running at high speed towards Fearow, eventually being surrounded by electricity, making him look like an electric missile. At the last second, he jumped into Fearow's chest, and a large explosion followed. After a few seconds, Pichu flew out of the cloud and, due to the attack affecting his stamina, landed rather hard on his back. Squirtle and Pikachu rushed over to him and began to help him up. As Pichu managed to stand up, the cloud lifted and they looked ahead to see Fearow smashed into the wall with swirls in his eyes.

"WE WON!" Squirtle, Pikachu, and Pichu all shouted and cheered.

After working their way back the way they came, Squirtle, Pikachu, and Pichu eventually were leaving the entrance of Tiny Woods, with Squirtle having picked up a few more berries on the way out. After getting a fair distance away in case Fearow came after them, they stopped near the pond where Squirtle had originally woken.

"Man, Squirtle, you sure were amazing back there! And thank you SO much for coming with me to help rescue Pichu!" exclaimed Pikachu.

Squirtle rubbed the back of his head and giggled softly. "Aw, it was no problem. After all, isn't that what rescue teams do?"

"I guess that's true!" agreed Pikachu, but he then noticed Pichu seemed to be staring up as Squirtle. "Hey, Pichu, is something wrong?"

"…Squirtle, you're so cool!" squeaked Pichu, surprising both Pikachu and Squirtle. Squirtle felt a bit awkward since Pichu's eyes were so big and they looked like they had stars in them! "_Um… he's looking at me like he adores me. But I guess I would be that happy if I just had my life saved!_"

Suddenly a voice shouted, "HEY! Squirtle!" They all turned to see who was calling and realized that it was Charmander and Chikorita. Soon, Squirtle's fellow teammates showed up looking a bit worried.

"Where have you been? We were getting worried about you with all the time you were gone!" sighed Chikorita.

"Uh, heh heh… sorry guys. I kind of happened to run into an emergency rescue mission, so…" Squirtle tried to say.

"Oh! Hey Pikachu, Pichu! What are you guys doing here?" Charmander asked, as he just noticed the two standing behind Squirtle.

"Well, like Squirtle was saying, he happened to be the only available member to accept my urgent rescue," explained Pikachu.

The three of them then proceeded to fill Charmander and Chikorita in on the details of the mission, from when Squirtle came across Pikachu up to defeating the Fearow looking to turn them into a Pokemon value meal. Once they were done, they stopped talking to let the story sink in.

"So that's what happened," said Charmander, then he grinned. "Well, it's a good thing you were in the right place, Squirtle!"

"Yeah, you sure are getting good at doing great on rescue missions!" agreed Chikorita, as throughout the day, he had been slowly improving his performances during missions.

"Y-You're not mad?" asked Squirtle, slightly confused.

"For what? Like you said, there's no telling what would've happened to Pichu if you hadn't been there. That's more than a good enough reason to explain why you were absent so long trying to find supplies," replied Chikorita

"Oh yeah, I got that done too!" smiled Squirtle, showing that he had managed to get some berries and a few apples during the rescue.

"Then all in all, this unexpected rescue was a total success!" stated Charmander proudly.

"Keep this up, and we'll be climbing up the ranks in no time," said Chikorita warmly. Squirtle was a bit curious as to what the ranks meant, but decided not to open his big mouth this time about something he didn't know.

"Oh yeah, I found these while we were in the woods. You can have them," Pikachu said while giving Squirtle the Oran Berry, Pecha Berry, and Rawst Berry. "Anyway, it was fun working with you, Squirtle. You ever need any help with your rescue work, come by and see me. I'd be happy to return the favor!"

"That's great, Big Brother!" squealed Pichu. "Thank you, Squirtle!"

"See you guys later!" said Pikachu and then they headed back to the village.

After a moment of watching them leave, Charmander turned back towards Squirtle and asked, "We stopped by the Pelipper Post Office before we came here, and there are still a bunch of jobs in the nearby areas still available. You still up for some more work?"

Squirtle grinned and said, "You bet I am!"

"Then come on, let's go!" said Chikorita before taking off for town with Charmander and Squirtle bringing up the rear. Squirtle still hadn't found any answers to his questions, but figured that he would find the answers

in time. And he was going to keep helping his new friends and rescue teammates, no matter how long it would take to find the answers.

2. Shockwave at Thunderwave Cave

After a hard day of rescuing, Team Go-Getters got ready to break off for the night, taking great pride in all the hard work they accomplished in one day. When they met back in front of the team base, Charmander and Chikorita told Squirtle he could stay there, since he didn't have a place to stay and they both had their own respective places. Squirtle was very grateful for this, and they parted for the night promising each other to make the second day even better than the first.

After removing his scarf and putting it and the toolbox in a nice dry corner of the base, he crawled onto the rocks in the small pond and quickly fell asleep. During the night, an ethereal feeling washed over him as he slept.

**Squirtle's Dream**

Squirtle's eyes opened to see flashes of many colors swirling around him. As he stood up and glanced around, shapes began to appear below him, as if emerging from a fogbank. As he watched, the objects steadily began to become clearer. Soon, he could make up a whole landscape, as he can see a forest, a running river, what seemed to be a city, and some mountains, one of which he was standing on top of.

"_Where am I…?" Squirtle asked himself as he looked around. "Am I dreaming this? Does this mean something?" Suddenly, he could feel another presence besides his own._

"…_Is someone here?" Squirtle asked out loud, but received no response. He then began to think to himself, "Is it someone I know…? Hmm… I can't remember… Everything's still so fuzzy." Suddenly, the dream began to fade to black as he looked for the source of the presence._

**Blackness. Then…**

Squirtle's eyes began to open to the sunlight shining down on him. After closing them for a second to adjust to the brightness, he propped himself up and rubbed the sleep out. As he pulled himself to his feet and splashed himself with some water from the small waterfall, he recalled what happened last night.

"I think I had a dream last night," he muttered to himself. "But I can't remember… what was that dream? What was it about?"

He then shrugged it off with a grin and said, "Oh well, I've got rescue work to do today with Team Go-Getters!" He walked over to the toolbox and pulled his Pecha Scarf out, tying it around his neck before taking the strap of the toolbox and placing it over his left shoulder and chest. "Chikorita said that rescue requests can also come in the mail. Maybe I

should check the mailbox to see if anything came," he mused to himself with a hand on his chin, then proceeded to exit the base.

At the front of the base, Squirtle stopped in front of the mailbox and proceeded to open it and look inside. "Nothing. Kind of like my memory." He smiled at his little joke, as it helped perk him up at not finding anything.

After closing the mailbox, he heard footsteps coming up behind him, and turned to see Charmander and Chikorita approaching him, awake and ready to work as well. Like Squirtle, they were also wearing their Pecha Scarves.

"Morning, Squirtle! Aren't you up nice and early this morning!" called Charmander. Chikorita just smiled, before noticing that Squirtle seemed to have been checking the mailbox after waking up.

"Oh, did you check the mailbox?" she asked.

"Yeah, nothing in it, though," he responded.

"Well, that's to be expected, I guess," Charmander sighed. "After all, we're still a new team, so it might be a while before we get any rescue requests in the mail. So don't let it get you guys down. We'll make our team name known soon enough!"

His words kept the team's spirits high, but their attention was suddenly directed to the east, as they heard the sound of wings flapping. It was one of the Pelipper postal workers, running his rounds for the day. He slowed down his pace and landed on top of Team Go-Getters mailbox.

"Mail call!" he said before dipping his beak to drop the mail in through the slot. "Good luck with your work today, amigos! I know I'll need some with all these rounds!" he stated, with his Hispanic accent being more noticeable this time. He then took off, leaving the team to see what he had delivered.

Charmander decided to check the mailbox this time, so he opened it and checked to see what Pelipper had dropped off.

"What did we get?" asked Chikorita. "Hmm, looks like we got our first issue of the Pokémon Newsletter," he said, then turned to Squirtle. "It usually contains help for rescue teams or news on current events in the world. Read it over if you have the time; I'll just put it back in the mailbox for now."

"Gotcha," said Squirtle. "Is there anything else?"

After putting the newsletter back inside, Charmander felt inside for anything else that might've been dropped off. Suddenly, he brushed against something and pulled out a letter. He glanced at it before he said, "Well, that was quick!"

"Why? What is it?" asked Squirtle.

"It's a Rescue Request! Check it out!" said Charmander, tossing the envelope over to Squirtle. After catching it, Squirtle opened the envelope and read it out loud.

"BUZZ BZZ ZZT! I HEARD ABOUT FROM MY FRIENDS, PIKACHU AND PICHU. PLEASE, YOU MUST HELP! AN ODD MAGNETIC WAVE FLOWED THROUGH THE THUNDERWAVE CAVE, CAUSING MAGNEMITE AND MAGNEMITE TO BE FUSED TOGETHER. THAT'S NOT ENOUGH TO FORM A MAGNETON, BUT THEY'RE NOW TRAPPED IN THE CAVE DUE TO THE WAVE'S ENERGY. PLEASE, WE NEED HELP.

FROM MAGNETMITE'S FRIEND."

"Sure does sound urgent," Squirtle commented.

"Well then, let's go!" said Chikorita. "Hold on, we should probably make a quick stop at the Felicity Bank and drop off our Poke before we go," Charmander suggested.

"Sounds good to me. Let's go!" Squirtle said, and the team set out for Pokemon Square.

Entrance to Pokémon Square…

As Team Go-Getters began to walk into the village, Squirtle glanced around, seeing some Pokemon playing in the grass and river, and noting some of the houses that were present in addition to the shops. He continued looking around until they passed the heart of the square and headed for the Felicity Bank. The bank owner, Persian, was busy grooming himself until he noticed Team Go-Getters walking in front of him. He stopped his grooming and smiled at them, saying, "This is Felicity Bank. How may I help you?"

"We came to deposit some Poke in our team account," explained Charmander.

"Okay, then I'll just need your team name so I can jealously guard it," said Persian.

"Team Go-Getters," Charmander said. Persian nodded and began to check his records.

"…Let's see… ah! Here it is. Now, how much would you like to deposit?" Charmander handed over the money Team Go-Getters had received from all the missions they had accomplished the previous day. Persian took it and placed the Poké into their account.

"There we go. Please visit again soon!" He said. Squirtle, Charmander, and Chikorita smiled and waved goodbye while Persian went back to his grooming. With their money stored, Team Go-Getters left the village and set out on the path leading south from their team base before heading north to Thunderwave Cave.

Later, north past the Tiny Woods…

After some time of traveling and a quick lunch break by a small pond on their way, Team Go-Getters soon arrived at the entrance to Thunderwave Cave. As they approached, they noticed two Magnemites floating in front of the cave; they turned around as they heard the trio approach.

"BZZT, YOU CAME TO HELP! OUR FRIENDS ARE AT THE END OF THE CAVE. WATCH OUT AS THE MAGNETIC WAVE SEEMS TO HAVE MADE SOME OF THE GROUND INSIDE UNSTABLE. GOOD LUCK!" said the Magnemite who sent the Rescue Request. Team Go-Getters nodded and entered to find the two Magnemite.

Later…

As Team Go-Getters proceeded deeper into the cave, they had to be cautious, as the cave was more dangerous than the Sinister Cave or Tiny Woods, as there were some points where they could not see the ground beneath some of the ledges. And like Magnemite said, the magnetic wave seemed to have made some cracks that made it look like the rock might break off from too much stress.

As they walked, they eventually came to an area full of sleeping Voltorb. Charmander told Squirtle and Chikorita to be quiet so they wouldn't wake, and Squirtle made sure to keep an eye on the toolbox so he wouldn't make the mistake of bumping a Voltorb like he did with the Shroomish at Sinister Cave. While they made it past without waking any of the Voltorb, a sudden wave of energy went through the area and it got to the Voltorb. They suddenly awoke in a red-eyed rage, and immediately went after Team Go-Getters.

"AHHH! Let's get out of here!" exclaimed Squirtle, to which Charmander and Chikorita were too happy to agree to. They tried to get far enough ahead to turn around and try to scare them back, but their round bodies allowed them to keep easily. This even allowed the Voltorb to land a few hits while the team was running.

Suddenly, Squirtle spotted a passage that seemed to branch off from the main path, and the fact that he couldn't see all the way down meant it probably had a good length to it. "Hey guys, let's go this way!" called Squirtle. They stopped running and quickly followed him down the tunnel, the Voltorb trying to slow down enough so they could follow quickly. Soon enough, though, the team found a wall at the end.

"Squirtle, this is a dead end!" cried Chikorita. "Guess I should have expected that," Squirtle said. He glanced down at his side and noticed an odd-looking rock next to his foot. "Hey, what's this?" he asked.

"Looks like a Gravelerock," explained Charmander. "You can throw them to cause damage, but we've got bigger things to worry about!"

They turned around, but the Voltorb hadn't shown up yet. Charmander and Chikorita were confused, but Squirtle had a hunch he knew why. They walked back a bit, and were surprised to see that because of the way the tunnel got narrower, the Voltorb couldn't squeeze through like the three of them could.

"Wow! I didn't even notice that the tunnel gets narrow as it goes on until now!" exclaimed Chikorita, secretly wondering if Squirtle already knew this.

"Looks like this was an excellent idea after all. Now they can't even try to run us over!" smiled Charmander. Unfortunately, the Voltorb didn't look very happy about this and the ones in front began to ready a Charge Beam attack. Once ready, they sent the attack towards the team, but Squirtle jumped in front and said what came to mind.

"Protect!" he shouted, and suddenly a green sphere appeared around him! Thanks to the narrow tunnel, Charmander and Chikorita were behind him and didn't suffer any damage thanks to his guarding them.

"Now we've got them! Dragon Rage!" Charmander yelled after the attack died down, his flame getting bigger, his eyes glowing white, and unleashing a big ball of fiery energy. The attack was powerful enough to knock out the Voltorb in front, knock out some of the ones behind them, and push the rest of the Voltorb out of the tunnel. Once the attack subsided, the team rushed to knock the Voltorb out before they could regroup.

"Tackle!" called Chikorita, crashing into several of the Voltorb, then turning to a group that was a ways off. She then shouted "Magical Leaf!" and sent glowing green leaves at those Voltorb leaving them down for the count.

Meanwhile, Squirtle and Charmander were behind her and dealing with the other Voltorb using Squirtle's Rapid Spin and Charmander's Scratch and Metal Claw. Soon, all the Voltorb were fainted, and, after enjoying their victory, watched the Voltorb go back to their resting area.

"That was pretty tight," said Squirtle. "Hey, Chikorita, you want an Oran Berry? You look like you might need one."

"No, there's no need Squirtle," she said, then focused her body and said, "Synthesis!" After a glow encompassed her for a few seconds, it faded and all of her wounds were healed. "See?" she smiled.

"Then we're all good! So let's go help those Magnemites!" Squirtle exclaimed, and Chikorita and Charmander echoed it before moving on.

Some time later, they reached the end of the cave, where they found the two Magnemites trying to detach from each other. They asked if Team Go-Getters was there to help, which they responded that they were.

"BZZT, HOW DO WE GET OUT OF HERE?" they asked. Team Go-Getters proceeded to guide the two back to the entrance to the cave. As they got closer, the Magnemite could feel their attraction to each other weakening. Once they were at the entrance, the magnetic wave stopped having an effect on them and they came undone! As they snapped, they fired several Thundershocks into the air, creating a mini fireworks show. A few went off-course, one of them accidentally hitting Squirtle!

"ZZT, SORRY ABOUT THAT…" they both apologized.

"Nah, that's okay. That stray wasn't enough to put me out of my depth," Squirtle joked.

"WE ARE VERY GRATEFUL TO YOU. WE WOULD'VE BEEN UNABLE TO SEE OUR FRIENDS AGAIN WITHOUT YOUR HELP," one of the other Magnemites said. They then gave Team Go-Getters their reward of 500 Poke and a Reviver Seed, which Chikorita said can fully revive any Pokemon that collapses from exhaustion. The Magnemite then left the cave, and Team Go-Getters soon followed, heading back for Pokemon Square.

After getting back, they saw that there was still enough time left in the day to do some Rescue Requests from the message board, so they set out for the Pelipper Post Office to see what kinds of jobs were available.

By evening, Team Go-Getters was quite exhausted from all the work they did and each of the members went home to rest so they could be ready for more work tomorrow.

Later that night…

Some ways off from the village, in an open area in one of the forested areas, a group of Pokémon, collectively known as Team ACT, had set up camp for the night.

"That was a bit of a tricky mission back at Magma Cavern, but it's good to know Plusle and Minun are safe and without any harm," Charizard mentioned.

"That's why they call for a Rescue Team of our rank; we can handle those kinds of jobs better than nearly any other team," Tyranitar said.

"Now… it's just a few more days until we are back in Pokémon Square. We'll stock up and see if there are any Pokémon that left requests that need our assistance," the leader, Alakazam, said. Charizard and Tyranitar nodded and got ready to settle down and enjoy their meal for the night.

3. In the Wake of Idols

Three days have passed since Team Go-Getters' successful Magnemite mission at Thunderwave Cave, and in that time, Pikachu has held true to his promise and came to help Squirtle, Chikorita, and Charmander with their rescue missions over the past two days. With the help they received from Pikachu, Team Go-Getters was promoted to the Bronze Rank, and they couldn't have been happier. However, the night before they were promoted, Squirtle experienced the vision he had had two nights ago, though he appeared in the forest this time, and could still only faintly hear the voice of whoever was in his dreams; he still could not see who it was either, though he could tell it was a Pokémon. Tonight, as he was sleeping, the dream once again came to him.

**Squirtle's Dream**

Squirtle opened his eyes to once again see the swirling colors, which continued to flash all around as the landscape once again formed. First, the mountains appeared as if emerging from a fogbank, with the forest forming a ways away from the base of it. In between the forest was a city, with grass and a pond near the forest side and a rocky terrain and a flowing river near the mountain's base. This time, Squirtle found himself in the streets of the city.

"_Again… it's that dream again for the second night in a row…" Squirtle murmured as he wandered through the city, seeing many large buildings, one of which had a futuristic feel to it and a building that looked like an ordinary orange roofed building outside, but had what looked like an arena inside. As he went towards the mountain side, he stopped at the base of a large statue of a Pokémon, which had an old plaque that he couldn't read because the fog-like nature of his dream prevented him from seeing what was on it._

"_Strange… it feels like I've been here before, but how?" Squirtle wondered as he continued to look at the Pokémon on the statue, which also looked familiar. Suddenly, he felt the presence again and turned to see the same silhouette he had seen last night._

"_That Pokémon… Who could it be?" he wondered as he tried to look closely at the one standing before him while listening to hear what it said. He realized he could hear a little better this time, and could tell whoever was talking to him was clearly a female._

"_Seems that I can hear better this time…" He then focused on listening to what the Pokémon had to say, though he could only hear bits of what she was saying._

"…_What? Human? Role? What are you talking about?" he asked the Pokémon, hoping to get a response, but the silhouette suddenly began to flicker as it disappeared._

"_N-no, wait. Please don't go. Please, I want to know more about what is going on," he pleaded, hoping it wouldn't fade away just yet and that he would be able to understand more. However, the Pokemon still disappeared, and suddenly the landscape began to fade away as well._

"_I can't…Stay focused… Everything's going black again…" Squirtle said as the darkness overtook the small rise he was standing on and he began to drift back to the real world as the swirling colors vanished too…_

**Darkness covered the area. Then a light appeared…**

The bright sunlight began to shine through the openings in Team Go-Getter's base, bathing the plants and water, as well as shedding some light on Squirtle. While he was already waking up, having it shine down right in his face made him fully wake up quickly. He stretched out before he stood up and took a dip in the small pond. As he enjoyed swimming and washing off anything on his body, his thoughts turned to the city in his dreams and what he heard.

"_Hmm… What was that about?" _he wondered as he climbed out of the water and got his scarf and the toolbox. "_I know I'm actually a human, but that Pokémon also mentioned something about a role. I woke up in this world with a head as empty as my stomach is right now, so I wonder what she meant."_

Before leaving, he grabbed one of the apples out of the toolbox to satisfy his empty stomach, then proceeded to exit as he continued to go through the questions in his head. He stopped just outside the doorway so he could finish off his apple, and after doing so, Charmander and Chikorita walked up, seeming to be refreshed by their sleep last night, though Squirtle couldn't tell right away since he was still lost in thought.

"Morning, Squirtle!" they both chimed, and they noticed that Squirtle seemed to be a little slow in answering them.

"Ha ha ha! What's the matter? Didn't get enough sleep last night?" grinned Charmander, seeming more uppity than usual.

"No, I got plenty of sleep. It's… Something else," Squirtle answered.

"Oh? What's that?" wondered Chikorita. Squirtle hesitated a moment before deciding that it was time he revealed the events that occasionally occurred at night.

"Well, you see…" And he proceeded to explain the dream he had had three times so far, mentioning the landscape, the swirling colors, the fog-like nature of the dreams, and the mysterious Pokémon that had been appearing and what she said. Both Charmander and Chikorita listened intently, taking in every detail that he mentioned.

"Mm-hmm… okay," Charmander responded as Squirtle finished his explanation. Chikorita then said, "Squirtle, you did say that you used to be a human, right?" At this, Squirtle shot them a look; it clearly said, "Yeah, I did, and how was it that YOU responded?" Chikorita and Charmander immediately took notice of what his face was saying, and immediately got nervous, knowing they had basically made fun of him when he told them he was a human before this.

"Uh… Heh heh… Yeah, that's right, you did mention that…" Charmander nervously replied.

"Well… Anyway, what I'm getting at is maybe those dreams happen to have something to do with what led to you waking up in the forest," Chikorita explained. Squirtle nodded, thinking that Chikorita made a good point.

Charmander then looked at Squirtle and asked, "So what do you want to do, Squirtle?" Noticing the confused look both Chikorita and Squirtle had, he continued, "Do you want to stay like this, or do you want to be a human again?"

Seeing what Charmander was getting at, Squirtle started to think about what he should say. "_Hmm… Until now, I never really thought about that. I was just going to stick with Charmander and Chikorita and see how things turned out. But… do I want to be a human again? I'm not sure… I like being Squirtle, but I can't just brush off my humanity like a temple caretaker sweeping leaves._"

Charmander noticed that Squirtle seemed to have a look of indecision, as if trying to find the best way to answer his question. "Is this a hard decision for you to make, Squirtle?" he asked, jerking Squirtle out of his thoughts. "Well, I think the answer's simple! It's more fun if you stay here with me and Chikorita!" Charmander exclaimed, to which Chikorita smiled, thinking the same thing. Squirtle still wasn't sure that was the answer to his dilemma, but decided to go along with it for now.

"Anyway, there are still plenty of Rescue Requests posted on the message board, so let's get to work today!" said Chikorita before running off in the direction of town, with Charmander and Squirtle close behind.

After passing through Pokémon Square and checking the board for missions, they prepared to depart when a cheery voice called for them, so they went over to the shop next to Felicity Bank.

"Friends are my treasures! Welcome to Wigglytuff Club-- a circle of friends!" the owner of the shop, Wigglytuff, proclaimed as they stepped up. As it turned out, not even Charmander or Chikorita knew what the Wigglytuff Club was, so Wigglytuff explained it to Team Go-Getters.

"See, the Wigglytuff Club is kind of like a social club between friends, but a little different since it's for Rescue Teams. It allows Rescue Teams to go to Friend Areas, which are special areas where both teams and friends of the team can gather to participate in all kinds of things, like sports and music. Essentially, it's a way for Rescue Teams to spend a day off with friends, and they also act as places for Pokémon to live at." Team Go-Getters understood what Wigglytuff was telling them, who then said, "Since this your first visit here, I'll give you the locations of Wild Plains and Mist-Rise Forest so you can start making new friends!"

"WAIT!" someone shouted, and everyone turned to see Pikachu, Pichu, and the Magnemites that were rescued coming towards them. Once they were there, they started talking to Wigglytuff.

"BUZZ BUZZ! IF YOU'RE GIVING LOCATIONS OF FRIEND AREAS, CAN YOU ALSO GIVE MY FRIENDS THE LOCATION OF THE POWER PLANT FRIEND AREA?" one of the Magnemites asked Wigglytuff.

"Yeah, and the Energetic Forest Friend Area too?" added Pikachu. "You see, we're all friends of Team Go-Getters and want to be able to participate with them in the events that go on in the Friend Areas where we usually hang out." Pichu nodded at what his brother said.

"Okay, gotcha! Anything for friends, after all! Just let me get a map, so that you know where they are…" said Wigglytuff as he rummaged behind his

counter for one. He then pulled one out and said, "I'm giving it away today! Wigglytuff, Wigglytuff, let's be friends… YOOM-TAH!" A bright flash then occurred, and the previously unmarked map suddenly had the names of the Friend Areas on it! "Congratulations! Now, be sure to hold onto that map so you know where to go. They may be close, but there are a lot of them!"

"Wow, thanks!" said Team Go-Getters. Wigglytuff then said, "From now on, if you meet someone who lives in a Friend Area not marked on your map and you make friends with them, their Friend Area will automatically be marked for you! I also sell them, so you can also buy from me if you want to go someplace new!"

"THANK YOU, WIGGLYTUFF!" everyone said, then one of the Magnemite said, "SPEAKING OF THE POWER PLANT, I THINK I'LL GO REST UP THERE. FEEL FREE TO COME VISIT ME, OKAY?"

"Sure thing! Thanks everyone!" Squirtle, Chikorita, and Charmander said. Everyone nodded and said goodbye to Wigglytuff, who said to come again and that they were all friends. The Magnemite left after a few moments, but Pikachu and Pichu stayed to chat with Team Go-Getters as they walked back towards the center of the Square. As they approached, they noticed that something seemed to be going on there.

"Please, I need help! You've got to help my friend!" said a Jumpluff, who looked really worried, to a Shiftry and two Nuzleaf. "Forget it. You'll have to do better than that if you want Team Shiftry's help." Shiftry, seemingly the leader, said. "B-But my friend just needs a gust of wind! Please!" cried Jumpluff.

"Hey, what's going on, Lombre?" asked Pikachu, as Team Go-Getters and Pichu were also curious.

"Oh, you mean that scene there?" Lombre asked, to which everyone nodded. Turning toward the center, he said, "That Jumpluff there has been asking for help, but not getting anyone's help. See that guy there, the one with the long hair and pointy nose?" he asked, indicating Shiftry. "That's Shiftry, and he's in a Rescue Team with those Nuzleaf. But they're a greedy bunch, because they usually don't accept jobs unless they involve a good money reward. Jumpluff has been asking around, but…" He then turned back to Squirtle, Charmander, Chikorita, Pikachu, and Pichu and said, "I feel sorry for that poor Pokémon. He needs a good Rescue Team that's willing to do it, no matter what the reward."

As Pichu was about to ask Team Go-Getters if they would try to help Jumpluff, everyone in the village center suddenly heard someone say, "Wait!" Everyone turned to the entrance, and Shiftry realized that it was Team ACT. "What? What is it?" Shiftry asked, seeming a bit worried about why Alakazam was addressing him, while everyone else to be amazed to see the famous Gold Rank Rescue Team was back.

Stepping forward, Alakazam said, "Rather coldhearted, aren't you, Shiftry? Jumpluff clearly said that his friend needs a strong gust of

wind to be rescued. Your leafy fans can whip up powerful winds, so it is an easy matter for you. Help that Pokemon out."

Shiftry looked back at Jumpluff, then glanced around a few times before relenting to what Alakazam said. "Agh… Alright, we'll do it. Come on, Nuzleaf," Shiftry said, before brushing past Alakazam's team to rescue Jumpluff's friend. Everyone was in awe at how Shiftry agreed without putting up any further argument.

Squirtle nudged Chikorita and whispered, "Hey, who are they?" Chikorita turned to him and said, "It's Alakazam's team, Team ACT." This was heard by Lombre, who realized she was speaking to Squirtle, and he said, shocked, "What? You've don't know who Alakazam is?!" Charmander and Chikorita knew that Squirtle was new, so they knew that he didn't know Alakazam's team, and they said this to Lombre. Still, Squirtle muttered under his breath "There goes my big mouth again…"

Lombre then explained, "Alakazam's team is the most famous one around these parts." He pointed to the team member to Alakazam's right, "That's Charizard. His Flamethrower is so hot, they say it can melt mountains!" Charmander then added, "He's also my older brother," which left even Chikorita shocked, as he apparently never mentioned this.

Lombre then pointed to the Pokemon on Alakazam's left and said, "That's Tyranitar. He takes great pride in his armored body and amazing strength." Lastly, he motioned towards Alakazam and said, "And that's the leader, Alakazam. He prefers to fight with psychic powers rather than physical attacks. He's endowed with an amazing brain and an IQ of 5,000. Apparently, he's memorized every event that has happened in the world. He's clearly in charge of all the commanding in the team." Squirtle nodded and said, "Gotcha."

Jumpluff went up to Alakazam and said, "Oh, thank you." Alakazam simply waved a hand and said, "No need for thanks. It's natural that you should seek help. If anyone else turns you down, come see me. Take care." Jumpluff then got out of Team ACT's way as they headed for the Pelipper Post Office, briefly stopping so Charizard could say "hi" to his little brother and ask how things were going. However, as they passed the group, Alakazam suddenly stopped, as if he sensed something, and turned around, which surprised some of the members in the small group.

Charizard and Tyranitar turned back, wondering why Alakazam stopped. "What's the matter?" Charizard asked. Alakazam continued to stare, seemingly into space, for a few more seconds before saying, "Nothing. Nothing is wrong." He then turned back to his teammates and said, "Come, let's go." With that, the team turned and headed for the Post Office, though Alakazam could still sense something was wrong in one of the Pokémon they had just passed, specifically the newest member of Team Go-Getters…

"Whew! That was kind of scary for a moment!" Pichu sighed, and the others had to agree with him. After Lombre walked away, Chikorita turned to Charmander and said, "How come this is the first I've heard of Team ACT's Charizard being your older brother?" Charmander thought for a moment

before shrugging and said, "I guess it just slipped my mind, heh heh," causing everyone to face-fault. Charmander then said, "Actually, it was my brother that inspired me to want to form a Rescue Team. I saw the things he did with Alakazam and Tyranitar once, and it really got me thinking of starting a team myself. I really want to be able to help out Pokémon just like he does, so when he said he was heading back after stopping for a visit at Mt. Cleft, I asked if there were places to live here in Pokémon Square, and when he said there were, I asked if I could tag along with him, since this is a great place for new teams to get started. After a while of talking with our parents, he agreed and brought me here so I could see if I had what it takes to begin a Rescue Team."

After Charmander was finished, Squirtle said, "Well, so far, it looks like it's coming along great, huh?" Chikorita said, "Yeah, that's right! Let's keep it going and make our team great, just like Team ACT!" Charmander smiled and said, "Thanks, you guys. And you're right. We're off to a good start, so let's get to work today!" And with that, they took off to complete the jobs they had picked off the message board, while Pikachu decided to stay behind since Pichu wanted him to help him train. But as Team Go-Getters set off to get their work done, Squirtle couldn't shake this odd feeling from his mind that popped up when Alakazam stopped and turned around. Even though it looked like Alakazam had just been staring off into space the whole time, Squirtle knew that Alakazam had actually been looking at him at some point, like he knew something about Squirtle. He didn't know what to make of it, but decided not to mention it to Charmander and Chikorita yet.

Meanwhile, throughout the whole commotion going on in the square, a certain Gengar was hiding out in the bushes where not even Aunty Kangaskhan could see him. He had seen and heard everything, including noticing that Alakazam seemed to have taken note of Squirtle for some reason.

"_What was up with him? Seemed like the guy was sensing something big, but why would he look at the little squirt? He definitely had his eyes on him for some reason…"_ Gengar thought to himself, before standing up.

"Oh well, it doesn't matter. So, the little lizard seems to have a dream of being among the best, eh? Well, soon, Team Meanies will be sure to show him he's WAY out of his league and all their successes were just dumb luck! Heh heh heh!" he said, snickering to himself. He then took off to go meet up with Medicham and Ekans.

* * *

Music:

Squirtle's Dream- Place of Memory (Final Fantasy IX)

Return of Team ACT- Opening/Menu (Metroid Prime) (Super Smash Brothers Brawl)

Working Towards a Dream- ~Battle Cry~ (Stand Up!) (Pokémon anime Season 12)

Gengar's Plot- Rival Appears (Pokemon Red and Blue)

4. Return of Team Meanies

It has been several days since Team Shiftry reluctantly set out to help Jumpluff's friend thanks to Alakazam of Team ACT, and Team Go-Getters has continued to do its best with the rescue work, their name being recognized as among the fastest growing Rescue Teams by the Pokémon Rescue Organization, who had recognized them as being qualified as a Bronze Rank Rescue Team. Word was slowly but surely spreading about the young Rescue Team, even that they were likely to have the potential to become a Silver Ranked Rescue Team.

Now, it was approaching dusk, and the members of Team Go-Getters were all inside their Rescue Team Base enjoying dinner together as they normally did before meeting up in front and breaking off for the night. They were making light conversation while eating, specifically about what happened during the day.

"Did anyone get a look at that Electabuzz that attacked us at Thunderwave Cave?" Charmander asked as he finished eating a berry. "His eyes reminded me of how Skarmory's looked when we battled her."

"Maybe it's because the natural disasters are making more Pokemon enraged?" suggested Squirtle as he bit into an apple. "Now that you mention it, some of the Pokémon in Tiny Woods acted similar to Skarmory before we beat her, including that Fearow that grabbed Pichu. Pikachu said the earthquake that opened the fissure might've been the reason for how they were acting."

"Maybe," Chikorita responded as she slurped up some berry soup, "but there are some Pokémon that can look and act like that without any kind of influence, kind of like how Team Meanies acted when we first met them. It could just be how they act, that's always a possibility.

"Speaking of Team Meanies, what happened to them after we rescued Pikachu? Does anyone know?" Squirtle wondered. "From what I've heard, they haven't been seen since then. For some reason, they just seemingly up and left after we helped them at Mt. Steel," Still, you've gotta wonder what they've been doing since then, like if they're doing their rescue work," Charmander said.

"Well, I don't think many of the villagers wonder that," Chikorita stated. "After all, they were just concerned for Pichu getting the help he needed and just hoped that whoever took the job would get it done. I mean, nobody really asked any questions about their involvement in the mission, except Aunty Kangaskhan, and just to ask if Team Meanies tried to cause any more trouble."

"Yeah, that's true, but it's not like they're bad guys, right? They just more represent the name of their team," Squirtle said.

"Well, I can't argue with that," replied Chikorita. "They act mean, just like their name, but if we see them again, we'll see if that's all they are."

"And who knows when that'll happen?" said Charmander. "We could see them tomorrow, or not for a while. Depends on what they've decided to do, right?"

"It'll probably happen sooner than expected," Squirtle said, and they went back to eating with that thought for a bit, before talking more about their day.

Later, dinner was done, and they went to the front of the base, where they said their goodnights and promised to do good work tomorrow before Charmander and Chikorita left for their own homes. After walking back inside, Squirtle lay down on his spot and went off to sleep, wondering if he'd see the dream tonight, since he hadn't since a few days ago. As he slept, he began to toss and turn, as he dreamt a new dream…

**Squirtle's Dream**

Squirtle opened his eyes to see where he was. However, they felt heavy, and he could only open them about halfway. This was still enough for him to see that the ground was rushing past him, as if he was being carried by someone or something in a hurry. He tried to move, but his whole body felt heavier than his eyes and could only manage to manipulate his head somewhat.

As his holder continued running, Squirtle became aware that attacks were flying towards them, possibly to stop whoever was carrying him. He could see flashes of fire just narrowly go over him, water blasts that just narrowly missed their target, and leaves whizzing past him, as this mysterious runner was quite fast and skilled at dodging without needing to slow down very much. There were also several Pokémon who attempted to come in close for a physical attack, some of which managed to hit. He even felt himself slipping a few times from all the dodges and hits, but their target was determined to not let him fall, and managed to do so. And yet, there was nothing he could do to escape or try to ward off the attackers. He just hung, lost in thought, through the whole ordeal.

_Soon, the grass and dirt faded into rock as he was run through a short passage, his Pokemon pursuers not giving up the chase. After exiting the passage, he saw some buildings much like the ones in his last dream, which were quickly passed as the figure soon stopped to change direction before taking a leap up a set of steps and then leaping up a ways ahead over a rise in a rock wall. Another direction change and they were off again, with the Pokemon still trying to catch up to them, though several were not as agile and were out of the chase. They continued in this direction for a short while, before his holder suddenly began to jump up the ledges of a large mountain. Although a few of the Pokémon were able to continue after them, by the time Squirtle could begin to see snow, they had lost track of him. His mysterious runner ducked into a cave and continued its ascent of the mountain, going into caves and out before reaching an ancient structure. In the rock at the other side, there

seemed to be a dark, glowing hole, which he figured must be some kind of portal. As they passed into it, darkness overtook Squirtle's vision…_

**End of dream**

Squirtle bolted up on his rock in a panic, breathing hard and sweating bad. He managed to slow his breathing by taking a few deep breaths. He looked into the pond to make sure he was alright, then he bent down to take a drink before deciding to take a quick swim to make sure he calmed down.

"_What did I see last night?_" he thought to himself as he swam. "_Who was holding me, and where were they taking me? I'm confused… But then again, that doesn't take much._"

After his swim, Squirtle pulled himself out of the pond and sat down near the rock with a waterfall for a minute to muse about what he had seen. Unable to draw an image that matched the one in his dream, he went to put on his scarf and grab the toolbox when Charmander, Chikorita, Pikachu, and Pichu walked through the door.

"Good morning, Squirtle!" Pichu chimed, snapping Squirtle out of whatever he was thinking of. He figured Pikachu would be coming to assist with the rescue jobs today, which Pikachu confirmed.

"Now that we're all prepared, let's go do our best!" Charmander spoke up, with Squirtle, Chikorita, and Pikachu agreeing with him. Pichu felt sad that he couldn't come with, but Pikachu reassured him that they would get back to training later that day, which brightened Pichu's spirits. But before they could leave to get any Rescue Requests, they heard a voice that sounded eerily familiar to most of them.

"Heh heh heh! So this is Team Go-Getters' base, huh?" The voice clearly belonged to a male, and everyone dashed out to see that they weren't wrong in guessing who the owner was. It was Gengar, the leader of Team Meanies, as well as his teammates, Medicham and Ekans, standing out in front!

"So it is. Not a bad piece of real estate, but they could at least jazz it up a bit, don't you think?" spoke Medicham. "Guess that depends on what you think is in chic, right?" Ekans asked.

"Excuse me, who are you three?" Pikachu asked, not knowing what to think since he had only heard of Team Meanies from Pichu and Team Go-Getters; he did not know much else about them. Everyone else seemed to be confused as to what Team Meanies was doing here; however, they did not seem to acknowledge that anyone had spoken at all. They just strode closer until something seemed to catch their eyes.

"Hey, look! A mailbox!" exclaimed Ekans. "Yeah, check it out!" grinned Gengar. They then proceeded to open the mailbox and noticed that there were Rescue Requests that were unanswered. "Ooh, look at those Rescue Requests! We'll take them all, thank you," chirped Medicham. At this, Squirtle, Chikorita, Charmander, Pikachu, and Pichu dashed forward from

the doorway, not pleased with the sight of what Gengar, Medicham, and Ekans were doing.

"Hey! Put those back! They were sent to us, not Team Meanies!" exclaimed Charmander. At this, Team Meanies finally took note of the five Pokémon standing in front of the base.

"Hey, relax! That doesn't mean that YOU have to do it, you know!" Gengar replied. "Yeah, don't be greedy. Spread some of it around and slack off for a change," smirked Medicham. "Besides, we haven't gotten anything worthwhile in the past few days, so you're just gonna lighten the load, got it?" added Ekans.

"What's with you guys? Why do you have to cause trouble to everyone you come across?" said Chikorita, getting sick of the way Gengar and his buddies were treating not only them, but also Pichu.

"Trouble? I prefer to call it hazing!" Gengar grinned. "Someone has to keep you from getting all the glory and rewards," added Ekans. "So go take a hike, kids, and let the professionals get to work," Medicham concluded.

"What, did helping you at Mt. Steel mean nothing to you?" Squirtle demanded to know. "We help you when you were in trouble, and now you do this?" Charmander growled, angry at this.

"Now why would we want to do that? We just need some actual opportunities to work, and you need someone to keep you on your toes, so this works on both levels. And there are still plenty of jobs at the Pelipper Post Office that are more time manageable for a Bronze Rescue Team, so chill out," Gengar explained, then turned to Medicham and Ekans and said, "I've said my piece, so let's go." The trio then took off before anyone had a chance to do anything.

"Jeez, they sure were a talkative bunch," said Pikachu when Team Meanies disappeared from sight. Pichu then ran over to the mailbox and looked inside. "Aah! They took every request that was in here!" he cried. Everyone rushed over to Pichu to comfort him; while they were doing so, they heard the Pelipper postal worker coming to make his usual deliveries, slowing down and landing on top of the mailbox.

"Mail call!" he said and dipped his beak, resulting in a small CLUNK being heard inside the mailbox. He then turned to look down at the Pokemon standing there and said, "Good day to you all! I believe that today's newsletter has some interesting information for all Rescue Teams. Well, back to work!" He then took off and went to deliver the rest of the mail he had.

Chikorita turned to Pichu and said, "Don't worry, Pichu. We've got some more missions, and it was starting to get crowded inside of that mailbox. Team Meanies probably ended up doing a favor for us and them." Pichu nodded understandingly, and then Squirtle added, "Still, next time they try to cause trouble, we'll be sure to show them not to take Team Go-Getters so lightly," which was echoed by Charmander and Chikorita.

Squirtle then decided to check the newsletter to see what Pelipper was talking about.

"What's up, Squirtle?" asked Pikachu. Squirtle glanced over the newsletter briefly then decided to read it out loud. Before he did, he brushed his hand over his head since it was kind of warm this morning, but as he did, he felt something besides a slight sweat. He hesitated a second, then began to read the newsletter.

"Attention to all Rescue Teams! Due to the numbers of new Rescue Teams being started, Pokémon from all over have decided to open new training facilities so new teams can learn lessons essential to creating an effective Rescue Team. Run by volunteer Pokémon, several of these dojos have been recently opened, which are listed below, along with their location:

Makuhita Dojo- Pokémon Square

Marowak Dojo- Treasure Town

Aqua Dojo- Pokémon Beach

Lightning Dojo- Pokémon Garden

Flame Dojo- Pokémon Village

Come and train your skills at any of these brand new locations to prepare your team for any challenges it may come across. You can keep anything you find as part of your training, in addition to gaining valuable experience.

From the Pokémon Rescue Organization"

After finishing, there was silence for a few moments, then Pichu stated, "Hey, maybe we should all go train at the Makuhita Dojo! I'll get to continue my training with big brother, and you guys can prepare yourself for handling more Rescue Requests!" After a moment's thought, everyone agreed and headed for Pokemon Square to go find the Makuhita Dojo.

Pokémon Square

After crossing the bridge, the group headed for the center to find out where the new dojo was located. Once there, they found Lombre, Snubbull, and Bellsprout seemingly hanging around. After asking them, the three pointed them to the south road, which would lead to the dojo. Before going, Charmander, Squirtle, and Chikorita stopped by Aunty Kangaskhan's warehouse to drop off a few extra items they had picked up yesterday, and she thanked them and bid them good luck. They all then followed the road and found the Makuhita Dojo. Since the doorway was open, they stepped inside.

Makuhita Dojo

Stepping inside, they found what appeared to be a large arena in the center, as well as what looked like the entrances to various training rooms along the wall. They were soon greeted by the owner of the dojo, Master Makuhita.

"This is the Makuhita Dojo! Through training, one begets true power!" boomed Master Makuhita. "Who is it that enters the dojo? It better not be that magazine guy or the insurance salesman again!" Everyone sweat dropped and giggled at this, then Charmander spoke up.

"Uh, no. Actually, we're all looking to train to up our levels and be ready for harder rescue tasks. We heard this was the place to come for that," Charmander explained.

"Ah! You wish to train at my dojo, do you? Your decision stands! Let the training begin! Prepare yourselves!"

5. Making the Grade

It was about midday, just shortly after lunch, and Team Go-Getters, along with Pikachu and Pichu, were still at the Makuhita Dojo practicing their moves. While they had stopped for a short lunch break, they were still training hard in the arena, practicing their moves on the targets Master Makuhita had prepared for all who came to train, as well as doing some friendly sparring against each other to test against moving targets, as well as making sure they could dodge each other. Noticeably, the members of Team Go-Getters weren't wearing their usual good luck Pecha Scarves. Squirtle was wearing a Special Band on his right wrist, a sky blue band that raised his long-range attacks, Charmander was wearing a Defense Scarf, a gray scarf that raised his defense, Chikorita was wearing a Power Band, a brown colored band that wrapped around her neck that increased physical attacks, Pikachu had a Zinc Band on his left arm, which raised his special defense, and Pichu had a Detect Band tied around his left ear, which raised his evasiveness and the ends gave his ear a notched appearance. All of these were either received from Rescue Requests, found in caves and forests, or had been bought from the Kecleon Brothers shop.

All morning, these five had been working on learning new moves and raising their levels in order to be prepared for the harder missions that they were now able to take on. Squirtle had grown quickly, perfecting Water Pulse and Aqua Tail, and was currently trying to learn Ice Beam in case they should encounter Dragon-type Pokémon in the future. Charmander had also been working hard, as he had learned Fire Fang and Slash, but was having trouble getting his flames to wrap up in a Fire Spin. Having already perfected Poisonpowder long ago, it didn't take Chikorita long to learn Sweet Scent, as well as Reflect and Light Screen for when Squirtle couldn't block attacks. While she was looking into more techniques she could use, Pikachu had managed to add Feint and Agility to his move set. And Pichu was having a better time getting a handle on his electricity, as he took less of a shock when he launched a Thundershock, as well as learning Sweet Kiss and Nasty Plot.

Now, with their lunch break over with, Squirtle, Charmander, Chikorita, Pikachu, and Pichu were supposed to undergo the second part of their training. They had no idea what it was, as Master Makuhita had been very tight-lipped about the details of what it involved. They expected to find out soon, though, as soon as Master Makuhita came back inside after answering the door, which was closed whenever there were Pokemon training. They knew who it was after a minute, however.

"FOR THE LAST TIME, I'M NOT INTERESTED! NOW, GET OUT!!!" came Master Makuhita's booming voice, followed by a loud WHUMP as he apparently kicked the salesman out the doorway. "Alright, fine! See how you like it when you aren't getting the discount you could have if you'd just agree to a subscription!" They could hear the voice of the magazine guy Master Makuhita had mentioned earlier, and Squirtle immediately knew that it was the kind of voice you heard from one of those slimy used car salesmen who tried to make a used car sound like it was the Persian's meow. After that, Master Makuhita walked back inside and slid the twin doors between the entrance and the main training room shut.

"Sorry about that. Those leeches never seem to know what it means to take a hint," he explained to his trainees. They all just said it was okay, knowing what it was like to try to convince salesmen that they had a life beyond the sales pitch and they were intruding on it. "Well then, let's just say we all feel the same way!" smiled Master Makuhita, which everyone agreed to.

"Now then, I did mention that we would be moving on to the next part of your training after lunch, right?" asked Master Makuhita, to which everyone nodded. "Well, as you all know, it's good to have a strong balance of offense, defense, and evasiveness when confronting a dangerous foe," he explained while walking towards one of the walls. "Usually, that's enough to be able to win in most situations. But there are times when a match can be decided before it even starts, depending on how you approach the situation or are approached. So a major factor in determining a winner can, ultimately, be the element of surprise," he said, stopping at one of the walls. He then turned his head around, grinned, and said, "Surprise!" He then pressed a hidden button on the wall and the arena floor suddenly opened like a trap door!

All five young rescuers fell a short ways before landing on a carefully positioned slide that would ensure they didn't hurt anything when they reached the bottom. After sliding down a ways, it suddenly split off into multiple directions, forcing everyone to go in a different direction. Soon they all landed at the bottom of their respective slide. Squirtle looked up to see he had landed in a forest area that had walls at the edges of it. Similarly, Charmander wound up in an ice cave, Chikorita in a swampy looking area, Pikachu in a set of old ruins, and Pichu in a granite cave.

"What's going on here?" was the first thing everyone said. Then, from up above them, they could hear Master Makuhita's voice. "This is the last part of your training that I mentioned. As much as you may think otherwise, there will be times when you can't be together. This final part will test you on using everything you've learned to see what you

need to work on individually. Find your way through the training room you are currently in until you can find the stairs which will bring you back up here. That is your final test."

Now that they knew what they had to do, each of them stood up and started to search for the exit.

Squirtle: Grass Room

As he began to wander around the forest area, Squirtle felt very at home with these trees surrounding him, as they made him feel relaxed. He was trying to be careful not to get too relaxed so he'd let his guard down, but he felt at peace all the same.

"Ah… so nice in here… and… for some reason, nostalgic," he said as he walked amongst the trees and various plants. Suddenly, some Exeggcute and Sunkern popped from the bushes while he was in the center of a clearing! A Psychic attack from one of the Exeggcute that was on the ground caused Squirtle to fall on his back as he was getting a Water Gun ready, and even caused him to spin on his back. This ended up altering his attack, as the Water Gun turned into water whips as he spun around, which ended up hitting the Pokemon in midair and sent them flying back into the bushes, as Squirtle was much stronger than them. He then quickly pulled himself back onto his feet and took out the one that used Psychic on him with a Bite attack. He sighed, seeing that he should have been more prepared for that, and resumed walking, staying alert this time. He did wonder, though, if what had just happened with his Water Gun would come in handy in future wild Pokemon attacks.

Chikorita: Poison Room

Chikorita was also not having a good go at her room, as there were many female Nidoran hanging around with their Poison Point ready. She had already encountered several, and she had to keep her distance, as the poison would've definitely slowed her down.

"Sigh… I wonder where the others ended up. I wonder if any of them landed in a better place," she said softly, not wanting to attract any attention in case there was something beside Nidoran in the swamp. "Well, I guess I'll just have to watch where I'm aiming my attacks. That way, I won't end up on the receiving end of those Poison Points!" she reassured herself, knowing Squirtle would probably think the same thing. With that thought in mind, she walked further into the swamp.

Pichu: Normal Room

Taking every step carefully, Pichu very carefully walked through the granite cave that he had landed in. He was very nervous about being all alone here, but he knew that the others were going to hope that he would give it his all. So he continued walking, hoping he could handle whatever was in the room. Suddenly, a Raticate jumped up, front teeth bared in Pichu's direction!

"Aah!" Pichu exclaimed, frightened at what stood before him. It attempted to charge him with a Quick Attack, but Pichu managed to get out of the way just in time. It continued to come after him, but when it did land a hit, it suddenly stopped moving due to Pichu's Static ability. Despite having taken damage, Pichu launched a powerful Thundershock, and, after recovering from the jolt, sent a Sweet Kiss that left it confused and allowed Pichu to tackle it, which caused it to faint. Pichu looked on in awe at what he managed to do, and then ran off to find the exit, as he was feeling joyful that managed to take down the Raticate, but he still wanted to get out quickly.

Pikachu: Dark Room

Pikachu was not having an easy time of things, either. Currently, a pack of Poochyena was attempting to chase him down, though thanks to his use of Agility, he was able to get some distance away from them. Currently, he was hiding behind a ruined pillar while the Poochyena were trying to locate him. He knew that because of their great sense of smell, it wouldn't take them long to pick up on their trail. So he kept a sharp eye out until he could hear the Poochyena coming. Once he knew they were close, he leapt out and gave them a powerful Thunderbolt. This left all three shocked and they passed out right there.

"You may have great noses for tracking, but I could use my great hearing to turn that into an advantage for me," he stated to the pack. "Now, I know I saw something that looked like a doorway while I was running. I hope I can remember where I was running from so I can double back and check what it was," he said, dropping to all fours to run back down the path that the Poochyena had come from, using his ears to listen for more attackers and using his nose to try to sniff out his scent so he'd know where he had run from.

Charmander: Ice Room

Despite his fire providing some warmth, Charmander still felt cold as he wandered through the icy surroundings. He wasn't exactly fond of cold temperatures, but he knew that he would have to put up with it sooner or later, and now would probably be a good time to start. Suddenly, a Piloswine slid on the ice and stopped in front of him!

"Hmm… I could take it out easily from here with a Flamethrower… but then that might affect the room itself," Charmander thought to himself as the Piloswine was getting ready to attack. Suddenly, it charged at Charmander with a Take Down, but Charmander was quick to dodge and retaliated with a Fire Fang. With the Piloswine taken care of, Charmander began to search for the doorway back upstairs while keeping an eye out for more Ice-type Pokémon.

A little later…

After wandering around for some time, everyone came across their own respective exits, almost simultaneously. They climbed up the stairs past the doorway, and soon found themselves back in the main training hall, where they found Master Makuhita waiting for them.

"Ah… You have all succeeded in completing the training! You've shown your worth in my eyes! Without a doubt, you have grown stronger from your training! I pray this success will drive you to train even harder!" Master Makuhita then bowed to the group, who thanked him for the lessons and bowed to him as well. They then headed out of the dojo and went back to town, talking about the rooms that each of them had landed in. Due to each of them seeing something different, they figured that there must be one room for each of the different Pokémon types.

"Hey guys, it's still pretty early in the afternoon. Maybe we can do some Rescue Requests for the rest of the day," Chikorita said. Everyone agreed, and Pikachu even said that Pichu could come along. So they set out for the Pelipper Post Office, passing a Delibird who seemed to be carrying a stack of official looking papers and had a bit of a bump on the head heading towards the Makuhita Dojo.

Later that evening…

Pikachu and Pichu had just said good-bye to Team Go-Getters, who were headed back to their team base to have dinner before heading home for the night. The two of them had just gotten home as well and were enjoying a meal themselves. While they were eating, Pikachu decided to ask a question.

"Hey, Pichu, while we were at the Pelipper Post Office earlier, one of the desk-Pelipper handed me a letter," Pikachu said after polishing off an apple. "Turns out it's from our cousin, Raichu. He says it has been too long since we last saw him and wants to see us and have fun for a while. What do you think? Wanna go see him tomorrow?"

"But what about helping Team Go-Getters with their rescue work?" Pichu asked. "Don't worry, they said it's alright if we don't help them every day. So they won't mind if we go see our cousin," Pikachu explained. At this, Pichu agreed, happy to go see their cousin again.

Meanwhile, hidden safely in a tree up above their house, a certain bird was listening in on their conversation. He was a Honchkrow, although he was a bit off-color from a normal one. Recently in the past couple of days, he had run into Team Go-Getters during one of their rescue missions, and he tried to give them trouble. They ended up combining their attacks together similar to what they did with Skarmory, leaving him to flee due to the damage it caused. Having just tracked them back to Pokemon Square, he was currently trying to find a way to get revenge on them.

"So, these little rats are looking to have a good time with someone they haven't seen in a while, eh? Well, if I follow them, there is sure to be a good time. For at least one of us, I'm sure. And then I can be sure to watch if their friends have what it takes to help them." With this, he left his hiding spot in the trees and took off to use this information to scheme…

6. Rescue Race

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokemon or anything related to it. This is only a fanfic based on one of the special episodes of the anime. No copyright infringement is intended.

Thought I might add one, in addition to the one in the first chapter.

Since the anime special used a location called Sinister Cave, I decided to change the Sinister Woods to Mirage Woods, just to prevent any confusion. Now, on with the story.

Two days have passed since Team Go-Getters, Pikachu, and Pichu went to the Makuhita Dojo to brush up on their skills. As they said, Pikachu and Pichu went to go meet with their cousin Raichu while Team Go-Getters continued with their rescue work. The trio was still making great progress with their work, and was close to being promoted to a Silver Rank Rescue Team. This morning, Squirtle woke up after an uneventful night, ready to get to work. He put his Pecha Scarf on and put the toolbox over his shoulder, and went to the front to wait for Charmander and Chikorita, who promptly arrived shortly after he stepped out the front door.

"Good morning, Squirtle!" Charmander chimed. "Ready to keep doing good work today?" Squirtle pumped his arms and then did a slight pose to let them know that he was. Chikorita couldn't help but grin at Squirtle's cute behavior. Suddenly, they heard a familiar voice call out to them.

"Squirtle! Charmander! Chikorita!" They all looked to see Pichu running towards them. He looked like he was in a panic about something, since he was so worried that he couldn't stand still.

"Hi, Pichu. What's the matter? I thought you were supposed to be gone for a few days with your brother and cousin," Chikorita wondered. Pichu was still a little jittery, but managed to calm down enough after a few moments to stand still and explain what happened.

"Please, Team Go-Getters! Please help Big Brother Pikachu and our cousin, Raichu!" Pichu exclaimed.

"What happened?" asked Squirtle, remembering that Pikachu got kidnapped by Skarmory last time and wondered what happened now. "Well, Pikachu and I were playing with Raichu," Pichu explained, "but then… I-I don't know what happened, but all of a sudden, Pikachu and Raichu were gone! While I was trying to find them, I heard them calling from Mirage Woods. But… that place is too much for me alone…"

"Oh, is that so? So then you require our assistance! Heh heh heh!" Everyone looked towards the path leading out to see none other than Team Meanies! "Hey, what do you guys want now? Are you here to steal more Rescue Requests?" Charmander demanded.

"Oh please! Do you honestly think we play the same note every time?" asked Medicham. "Heh, right. We'll still do that, but not today," Ekans stated. "So here's what IS going to happen today," said Gengar, thrusting a finger out. "Since we're not going to ignore anything you three get, why don't we make it a contest?"

"A contest? What are you talking about?" Chikorita asked, very confused about what Gengar was saying. "Simple. Whoever overcomes the challenges in Mirage Woods and gets to Pikachu and Raichu first is the winner and gets all the glory. Like I said, simple," Gengar explained. He then turned to Medicham and Ekans and said, "We're all set as we are, so let's go!" They agreed and all three took off for Mirage Woods.

Team Go-Getters and Pichu watched them go, before Pichu asked, "What are they doing? What's gonna happen to big brother and Raichu?" They could tell he was doing his best to fight back the tears, so Charmander walked up to him and said, "Don't worry. They're just trying to motivate us. We'll be sure to get to Pikachu and Raichu before they do." Pichu felt reassured and wished Team Go-Getters good luck since he was too tired from trying to get back to Pokemon Square by himself to be able to help.

"You think we should go stock up before we head out to Mirage Woods?" Squirtle asked, which Charmander and Chikorita both thought so too. They headed for Pokemon Square with Pichu in tow, and, after dropping him off at home, stopped by the Kecleon Brothers shop and Aunty Kangaskhan's warehouse to make sure they had everything they needed to face the Mirage Woods. After making sure they were prepared and dropping off their extra Poke at the Felicity Bank, they started out after Team Meanies.

After leaving the village and passing their Team Base, Team Go-Getters headed east after reaching the village outskirts in the direction of Mirage Woods. Later, after a short break at the cove near the forest, they arrived at the entrance to Mirage Woods.

"Well, this is it. Mirage Woods," Chikorita said. They glanced at the trees that surrounding the main path and noticed that the way they were positioned meant some sunlight didn't cut through the treetops. "So Pikachu and Raichu are both somewhere in the depths of here, huh?" Squirtle asked, simply trying to say something. "Right, and Gengar and his team are probably already inside. So we need to hurry, but also be careful. They don't call it Mirage Woods for nothing after all," Charmander explained, and they went in.

Since there were dark areas in the woods, Charmander's tail flame came in handy here, just like with the Sinister Cave. They kept watching out in case anything tried to attack them from any direction, examining anything that caught their attention. But even so, the three couldn't help but feel that they were being watched, specifically by the trees.

After some time of walking and encountering some Grass and Bug type Pokemon, the team really began to get the feeling that they were being followed. When they looked back, they could occasionally see trees on the path they had just walked. Soon they passed into a clearing, when suddenly they were surrounded on all sides by tons of Sudowoodo!

"Oh man, what did I do now?" Squirtle asked as he stared at all the Sudowoodo looking back at them. "You didn't do anything. This is what's called a Monster House!" Chikorita explained, also nervous from all the looks they were receiving. "They usually pop up in areas that have a bunch of items or spare change, like this one," Charmander explained as Squirtle did notice a few items like Max Elixirs and berries in the clearing, along with some dropped Poke. Meanwhile, the Sudowoodo had had enough of the trio just standing there and began their attack.

"SCATTER!" Charmander exclaimed, and the three did just that, just making it out of the way before all the Sudowoodo could pile on top of them. Upon landing, the Sudowoodo immediately went after Team Go-Getters, who turned to fight.

"Magical Leaf!" Chikorita called, launching the glowing green leaves at several Sudowoodo, who fell due to being Rock type Pokemon. She also managed to knock out several with her Tackle attack. She then checked on how her fellow teammates were doing with their Sudowoodo.

Charmander, despite Fire type attacks being little good against Rock types, was still able to handle many of the Sudowoodo with his Flamethrower and Metal Claw attacks. However, Squirtle was not doing so well, as she quickly came to the realization that most of the Sudowoodo had gone after him, and he was having trouble fending them all off.

"Ah!" Squirtle cried out as he got hit by a Hammer Arm, knocking him back into a tree. Thankfully, his shell helped him absorb a small amount of the damage this caused, but still left him dazed. Chikorita darted in to help him, launching a Razor Leaf that knocked out a few, but the others turned on her and used Double-Edge to send her flying. By this time, Charmander had handled all of the Sudowoodo that were sent after him and had also gone to help out. This time, the Sudowoodo knew he was coming and forced him to head back with a combined Rock Throw. This distraction, however, was enough for Squirtle to recover some and unleashed an attack on them.

"Water Pulse!" he called out, dropping to his hands and causing his eyes to glow blue. Pulses then appeared underneath the group of Sudowoodo in front of him and then they were caught up in a water tornado and lifted up above the trees. Charmander, having made over the rocks that the Sudowoodo had thrown, jumped up and shouted, "Fire Spin!" He then executed a perfect Fire Spin, which surrounded Squirtle's Water Pulse, resulting in a tactical fusion of fire and water. When it ended in a spectacular blast, all the Sudowoodo fell down, passed out from the sheer power of the two attacks.

"Whoa, Charmander, that was so amazing! Looks like you perfected your Fire Spin attack!" Squirtle exclaimed, caught up by the perfect combo that Charmander had managed to create. Charmander had to smile and giggle a bit at this, as he knew Squirtle was right about perfecting the move. He also had to admit that it was a beautiful and awesome combination.

"It sure was," Chikorita agreed. She then turned to Squirtle and said, "You should eat an Oran Berry since- huh?" She suddenly realized that Squirtle's injuries had almost completely healed on their own, which Charmander also took note of. They were so preoccupied by this that they didn't notice a Scyther sneaking up on them. Squirtle noticed, and quickly reached into the toolbox and grabbed a Gravelerock. Acting quickly, he made a perfect throw as the Scyther leapt into the air and was about to come down on Chikorita and Charmander. The Gravelerock hit its mark and threw the Scyther off-balance both in the air and when it landed. This is when Charmander and Chikorita noticed it and Charmander knocked it out with a Slash attack.

"Whew, nice save, Squirtle," Charmander said, and Chikorita agreed. Squirtle then put the toolbox back over his shoulder, collected the items and Poke in the clearing, and they pressed on. Due to the confusion of with the Scyther, the question of why Squirtle's wounds had healed so quickly was forgotten.

Some time later, after running into more Bug and Grass type Pokemon, as well as some more Sudowoodo, Team Go-Getters finally got to a part of the woods that appeared to be close to the end. They emerged from the trees and found themselves in a large clearing, with a small gathering of trees at the opposite end. When they got close to the trees they stopped to talk.

"Wow, we sure have come quite a ways into this forest, huh?" Squirtle said, remembering how much forest they had walked through. "We sure did. And we managed to handle everything pretty good, right team?" Charmander asked. "Mm-hmm. I bet Pikachu and Raichu are up ahead. But I wonder what happened to Team Meanies?" Chikorita said, as they had covered a good part of the forest, but had seen no sign of their rivals. Squirtle and Charmander were just as confused as she was.

"Well, wonder no longer!" Gengar's voice ripped them out of their conversation, as suddenly Team Meanies darted up from behind and stood in front of them, blocking the path ahead. "Nice to see you made it this far, but do you have what it takes to go all the way?" Gengar asked. "The best way to find out is with a test. And the test is Team Meanies!"

"What!?" Team Go-Getters exclaimed. "But you proposed a contest!" Chikorita exclaimed. "What are you up to now?" Squirtle asked.

"Weren't you paying attention? He said that the winner would have to overcome the challenges in these woods," Medicham said. "And this happens to be the last challenge, made possible by Team Meanies. A battle between Rescue Teams!" Ekans stated. "Heh heh! That's right, because we happen to be curious about you lot. You may have beaten Skarmory during your first mission, but how strong are you three now? That's the reason I proposed this contest in the first place. So we could see for ourselves just how strong you've gotten. So let's see what you're made of, Rescue Team Go-Getters!" Gengar said.

Before the battle started, Squirtle, Chikorita, and Charmander whispered amongst themselves. "We're strong enough; we just have to work together

to handle them, right guys?" Squirtle asked. "Right, Squirtle, as long as we handle this like the team we are and give it everything we have, we can beat Team Meanies!" Chikorita said. The three nodded to each other, then turned to Team Meanies and Charmander said, "Okay, Gengar, you and your teammates are on!"

And the battle began! Both teams launched at each other, hitting hard and getting broken off into respective one-on-one spars. Charmander against Ekans, Chikorita versus Medicham, and Squirtle battling Gengar, for real this time, as the two teams decided to work together by using the divide-and-conquer method.

Charmander and Ekans seemed to be watching each other's movements, waiting for the other to strike. At close range, they were using Slash and Bite when they did move, while when they were away from each other they used Flamethrower and Poison Sting. Since Flamethrower was more powerful, Ekans tried to keep Charmander at close-range. He was hoping to land a bite that left Charmander stunned enough that he could use Wrap to restrict his movements.

Meanwhile, Chikorita and Medicham seemed to be a bit more unbalanced. With her Detect move, Medicham was able to fend off many of Chikorita's attacks and then deliver either a Confusion attack or a ThunderPunch at her. Even though she was a Grass type, Chikorita still suffered from the ThunderPunch attacks. She was soon able to make it more even by using her small size to get in close, delivering Tackle attacks, as well as her newly learned Body Slam. Even so, Medicham's Detect was still giving her trouble.

As for Squirtle and Gengar, they were mostly sticking to long-range attacks, such as Shadow Ball, Night Shade, Water Gun, and Bubble. Gengar was sticking to long-range since Squirtle could also use his small height to help him, as even though Gengar's Lick attack was wide, he could still get out of the way pretty well, and then follow up with a Special Attack. Hypnosis wasn't helping much either, so in order to force Squirtle to go with moves like Aqua Tail and Bite, he began to use Spite to drain the Power Points of Water Gun, Water Pulse, and Bubble.

After a while, the two teams were still going at it, but they were both starting to run out of steam. Charmander had finally succumbed to a Bite attack from Ekans and was now caught up in his Wrap attack. Squirtle and Chikorita wanted to help him, but they had too much pressure being put on them by Gengar and Medicham. Medicham and Chikorita were still trying to duke it out at close-range, while it seemed that Squirtle would be forced to do the same with Gengar shortly. Gengar's Spite had drained the PP of all of Squirtle's long-range moves except for Ice Beam, but he still hadn't managed to perfect it during several missions that occurred during the last two days. But with Gengar getting another Night Shade ready, he knew that he would have to get it down now, since he was too beat up to do any more dodging. So he focused as much as he could and began to charge up cold energy in his mouth. As Gengar launched the Night Shade for what would surely be a knockout hit, Squirtle launched the energy from his mouth, which turned into a perfect Ice Beam! The two attacks collided in midair, trying to overcome each other in the power struggle.

Gengar's seemed to be pushing forward slightly, but as Squirtle tried to focus more energy into his attack, something from within seemed to give it to him, and he quickly overpowered the Night Shade, striking Gengar right in the face and turning him into a block of ice!

"Gengar!" Medicham and Ekans shouted, both noticing that he had been frozen on the spot. Much to Charmander's relief, Ekans let up on his Wrap, allowing him to breathe some, though he didn't try to get out right away. Medicham, after a moment, smacked Chikorita away with a ThunderPunch and then took off for Squirtle while Chikorita recovered from the hit. "Think you're a tough one, huh? Well, we'll see how tough you are in a moment. Force Palm!" she called, charging up energy in her hand as she ran, focusing it into her palm. She was hunched over as she ran, so she could hit Squirtle without the need to slow down, since she didn't need to anyway. She was mad, and doubted that Squirtle had very much energy left, much less any to dodge an attack, which was correct as Squirtle couldn't muster up any energy to move his feet very far, so he did the only thing that could do and held out his arms, in order to help brace for the attack. She was on him quick and aimed the attack right into his arms, knowing he couldn't stop her and would get hit in the face. The attack came rushing towards Squirtle and…

Silence. Dead silence. The whole clearing had just gone quiet at what just occurred. Everyone, even the frozen Gengar, couldn't seem to grasp what they were seeing. Medicham had sent the attack right into Squirtle's outstretched hands, expecting them to give way and leave his face wide open. But that didn't happen. Instead, Squirtle had somehow caught her hand in midair and was pushing back against her hand, despite the slight tingling in his arms from the energy she had gathered up. Medicham was still trying to push the palm into him, putting more strength behind it, but Squirtle could only respond in kind, pushing back against her, hardly moving at all in spite of his small size.

"Argh, impossible!" Medicham growled, not believing that the little guy was actually pushing back to stop her attack and succeeding. "Give up! You can't push me back!" she continued to put more force behind it, but he just barely seemed to be able to push back in kind. She was starting to get tired of this, and then decided to make use of her free hand, pulling it back to charge up a ThunderPunch, but Chikorita picked up on this when she saw the arm pull back. Before the attack was fully charged just out of Squirtle's range of vision, she dashed forward and landed a Tackle attack in the center of Medicham's back, sending the Psychic and Fighting type flying, which knocked Squirtle off his feet and made him land on his butt. The force of the Tackle attack sent Medicham flying into Ekans, which also caused him to fly a small distance and release Charmander before they both landed hard on the ground.

While Medicham and Ekans recovered and began to move to help Gengar shatter the ice, Chikorita and Charmander went over to Squirtle, who was still on the ground and panting hard, sweat dripping down his face. "Are you okay, Squirtle?" Charmander asked, very worried about him. Squirtle could only nod, as he tried to get his breath back and wipe all the sweat off of his face. "Are you sure? You look like you could use an Oran Berry this time," Chikorita asked, filled with concern for Squirtle, who

replied, "*Pant, pant* I don't… think an Oran… Berry will *pant* help here…"

While the three of them talked, Medicham and Ekans worked to help Gengar break free of the ice from Squirtle's attack, and succeeded after a few minutes. Gengar was still a bit frosty from being frozen, but was soon back on his feet. "Alright then, playtime is over, kids!" he shouted, catching Team Go-Getters attention. "Since you all seem to be up now, let's finish this battle the proper way: one last attack!" As it turns out, Squirtle was feeling better at this point, so they agreed to what Gengar said. They all mustered up as much energy as they could, then shouted out as they launched their attacks.

"NIGHT SHADE!"

"CONFUSION!"

"POISON STING!"

"WATER GUN!"

"FLAMETHROWER!"

"MAGICAL LEAF!"

The attacks all launched through the air, colliding with each other as the attacks wrestled for dominance. All of a sudden, the members of Team Go-Getters began to glow, which signified that their special abilities, Overgrow, Blaze, and Torrent were activating. With the extra boost from these abilities, their attacks easily overpowered those of Team Meanies, which were even with them until now. The attacks hit hard, and left Team Meanies down for the count. Team Go-Getters then got worried that they had been badly hurt and rushed over to help them.

"Maybe this will help them heal. Aromatherapy!" Chikorita said, glowing slightly and unleashing a fragrance that made everyone feel calm and relaxed. As suspected, even Team Meanies enjoyed the scent and soon were back up, though they hadn't fully healed yet. For this, Team Go-Getters once again split an Oran Berry into three and gave them to Team Meanies, though this time, Gengar didn't try to prevent himself from becoming a charity case.

"You guys feel better now?" Squirtle asked, to which they agreed, and he flashed a happy face at that. They were going to ask why they bothered to help them, but decided not to. "We'd better find Pikachu and Raichu now, guys," Charmander said, and Squirtle and Chikorita agreed while Team Meanies remained silent. All of a sudden they heard a voice coming from the patch of forest that Team Meanies had been blocking.

"Is that… Team Go-Getters?" Everyone turned in the direction of the voice, and saw Pikachu coming out along with a Raichu. Team Go-Getters went over to where the two were, while Team Meanies decided it was best to just stay put and look away. "Hey, Pikachu, Raichu. You guys are okay?" Charmander asked. "Yeah, we were wondering around in there for a

while, but then we heard a bunch of sounds, so we followed them, and pretty soon, we started hearing voices as well," Raichu explained, and Team Go-Getters realized they must've heard the battle that was going on. "What happened? Why is Team Meanies here?" Pikachu asked, since he could tell there had been a battle in the clearing. "Oh, don't worry about that. They were just engaging in a little friendly competition, that's all," Squirtle explained. "Right, so let's get you both back to Pokemon Square. Pichu was really worried about both of you," Chikorita said, and at that they followed Team Go-Getters back into Mirage Woods. Squirtle did stop and ask if Team Meanies was coming, but they just said that they'd be along in a minute. So he went to go catch up with the others, leaving Team Meanies alone in the clearing for a few minutes.

"Well, what do you think, Gengar? Your interest satisfied now?" Medicham asked, not sure what Gengar was thinking right now. "Eh, no doubt. They're definitely getting tougher, but they lucked out on that last attack," Gengar stated. "What do you mean?" Ekans asked, as he didn't know what Gengar meant. "You might not have noticed, but their special abilities activated, which is why their attacks overpowered ours. That means otherwise, we're on about the same level as they are." Gengar's grin got wider, "Which is the reason we need to get some work done and show them that we're higher than they'll ever be. So let's get out of here, get some work done, and show them what it's like to have Team Meanies as their rival team!" Medicham and Ekans echoed this last statement, and they stood up and took off, leaving the Mirage Woods a different way that they found while they were searching the woods.

Team Go-Getters Team Base

"This is so great! Welcome back big brother and cousin!" Pichu exclaimed, overjoyed to see them both back safe and sound. "Thank you, Pichu!" they both replied, glad that he had gotten help since they last saw him. "And thank you, Team Go-Getters!" Pichu said, turning back to the Rescue Team. His face then got sad, "Oh, but I can't really pay you for this…"

"Don't worry about it. We didn't do it just so we could get a reward," Squirtle said. "Yeah, just like last time, we're glad to see that you're back together with both your big brother and your cousin," Charmander added. Pichu just stared at them before uttering, "…….Oh wow…," he said, more impressed with Team Go-Getters than ever before. "You guys are much cooler than I thought! Now I definitely want to join a Rescue Team when I get old enough!" Chikorita smiled and said, "Hey, that's great, Pichu! You be sure to chase that dream, okay?"

Suddenly, Charmander's eyes lit up. "I have an idea." Squirtle and Chikorita looked at him, wondering what he was thinking. "We should really do something with this place, guys. You know, make our Team Base into something really impressive one of these days."

"Whoa, a Rescue Team Base is cool! I want to work here when I'm old enough!" Pichu exclaimed. "Heck, we could all work here, couldn't we?" Raichu asked, as Pichu's enthusiasm was catchy. "Great, than that's what we'll do! We'll work hard to build up our Team Base!" Charmander said. Everyone sounded excited at this. "Listen, we have to go now. Raichu is

going to be staying with us for a while. I don't know how long, but we need to make sure we have a comfortable place for him, okay?" Pikachu said. "Okay, guys. Be careful going home!" Squirtle called out to them as they went.

Team Go-Getters noticed it was starting to get late, as it was a long way to Mirage Woods and back, so they decided to have an early supper and go home early. Before sundown, they met in the front like usual before they all went home. "I don't know what Gengar really wanted out of that encounter, but we did get a chance to show Team Meanies our strength and rescue Pikachu and Raichu. I'd say today was a good day, don't you guys?" Charmander asked, and Squirtle and Chikorita agreed. "It was a bit of a tiring day overall. So let's all head home for the night. We can do more good work tomorrow! See you, Squirtle!" Chikorita said. And with that, Charmander and Chikorita headed for their homes, while Squirtle went inside the Team Base, removed his scarf and the toolbox, took a quick swim, and crawled on to his rock to sleep the night away.

That night, at the village outskirts…

A dark figure was standing on the crossroads later that night, contemplating what he had seen in Mirage Woods that day.

"Hmm, so those little weaklings can handle an ambush and a rivaling Rescue Team all in one day, huh? Well, I don't think I need to worry about that Team Meanies, though they may serve some use in the future. Right now, I just need to find something I can use to exact my revenge on that Team Go-Getters. Think they can just get away with beating me, do they?"

And with that, the figure spread his wings and took off into the night.

Some music that inspired me for this chapter:

Gengar's challenge- Suitable Opponent (Sonic Adventure 2)

Sudowoodo Monster House- Exorcizing Evil (Okami)

Pre-battle talking- Showdown with King Arthur/Knight of the Wind Instrumental Mix (Sonic and the Black Knight)

Battle with Team Meanies- Enemy Attack (Boss Battle) (Final Fantasy X)

Turning the tides of battle- Pokemon Mystery Dungeon Theme Song (Pokemon Mystery Dungeon series)

Patience- Underground Activities (Final Fantasy X)

See you next time!

7. The Mystery of Silent Chasm

As the moon hung high in the sky, the Pokemon in Pokemon Square and the surrounding areas were all asleep and dreaming. At Team Go-Getters Rescue Base, Squirtle was dreaming a dream that felt very familiar to him.

**Squirtle's Dream**

A bright flash suddenly appeared, covering Squirtle's vision. When it cleared and his eyes opened, he could see himself floating in a space that was full of stars. All around him, he could see bright lights flashing. As he looked, he suddenly caught sight of a blue light and a pink light that seemed to be fading away.

He could sense something strong emanating from both lights, even as far away as they seemed. It almost felt like they were trying to thank him for doing something. It was at this point that they finally faded away out of sight.

"_Well… 'til we meet again…" Squirtle whispered, as his eyes closed once again…_

**End of dream**

Squirtle yawned as he woke up from his pleasant sleep, the sun shining down on his face. He rubbed his eyes to get the sleep out of them, then stood up and did a few stretches to get ready for work. Afterwards, he went to get the toolbox and his scarf, first tying the scarf around his neck and then setting the strap from the toolbox on his shoulder so it sat comfortably. Not really think of much in particular, he exited the small cave that was the Team Base to meet up with Charmander and Chikorita, glancing into the small pond on the outside as he left. He stopped, and looked back in the water, staring at his reflection. He could've sworn he had just seen something that looked a bit off about him. He brushed his hand over his head, and felt the same feeling that he had felt a few days ago before they went to train at the Makuhita Dojo. He splashed a little water on his face, and it seemed to make it better, as he couldn't see whatever had caught his attention in the first place. While he was doing this, Charmander and Chikorita walked up.

"Good morning, Squirtle. Is something wrong?" Chikorita asked, as she had noted that he had been looking at the water. "Oh, no, nothing's wrong. I just thought I saw something in the water, that's all," Squirtle replied, as he was sure that was what had happened. "Well, that's okay then. Let's do more good work today!" Charmander said, and Squirtle and Chikorita responded in kind. Suddenly, they heard a voice from nearby.

"Umm… Hello?" a small voice called out, which sounded worried. "Huh? Who's there?" Squirtle asked, and they all looked to see who had called to them. As they turned, a Jumpluff floated over to them. "Umm… This is Rescue Team Go-Getters base… Are you Team Go-Getters?" Jumpluff asked, sounding a bit uncertain. "That's us," Charmander replied, then looked at the Jumpluff closely. "Hey, aren't you…"

**Flashback**

"_Please, I need help! You've got to help my friend!" said a Jumpluff, who looked really worried, to a Shiftry and two Nuzleaf. "Forget it. You'll have to do better than that if you want Team Shiftry's help," Shiftry, seemingly the leader, said. "B-But my friend just needs a gust of wind! Please!" cried Jumpluff._

**End flashback**

Charmander brought his fist into his palm as he recalled the scene. "That's right, we saw you in Pokemon Square. You were the Jumpluff who asked Shiftry for help. We saw Shiftry's team accept the job after Team ACT stepped in." Squirtle and Chikorita also remembered this after Charmander mentioned it.

Jumpluff looked sad as he said, "Yes, but… Shiftry… He hasn't come back from the mission yet…" This shocked Team Go-Getters, since Shiftry accepted the job almost six days ago. "Seriously? He hasn't returned?" Chikorita asked.

Jumpluff then explained, "You see, our friend Jumpluff got stuck between some rocks. We Jumpluff can go anywhere as long as we catch a wind, but… For some reason, even though the skies in that area are filled with thunderclouds, no winds have blown."

"Not even a breeze?" Charmander asked, and Jumpluff nodded. "Hmm, that is strange. Please continue."

"Well, Shiftry's leaf fans are capable of whipping up powerful winds, so we thought Shiftry could dislodge our friend, but…" Jumpluff stopped in order to let it all sink in.

"But Shiftry hasn't come back yet? It doesn't sound like a very challenging mission for a team like Shiftry's. Hmm…" Charmander mused. He then looked at his fellow teammates to see what their thoughts were. Chikorita still seemed to be thinking, but Squirtle looked to be past that. "Hey, that's the spirit, Squirtle. Your expression is all I need to see. You're ready for this mission, aren't you?" Charmander asked. "You know it! Let's go find out what happened!" he responded, pumping a fist. Chikorita admired Squirtle's determination and agreed with him. "Okay, then, we'll go find out what happened to them. Where was Team Shiftry headed off to?" Charmander asked Jumpluff.

"Oh, thank you!" Jumpluff replied, overjoyed. "Our friend got trapped at Silent Chasm, so that's probably where Shiftry went. Thank you so much!"

"No problem! You can count on us!" Chikorita replied. "Let's go get some supplies, then head out!" Squirtle and Charmander agreed, and headed for Pokemon Square to get any supplies they needed. They stopped at all the shops in town, including Wigglytuff Club and Felicity Bank. With all of their needs taken care of, the Rescue Team left Pokemon Square and followed Jumpluff northeast, a ways past the Mirage Woods.

Entrance to Silent Chasm

As Team Go-Getters and Jumpluff stood on the cliff near the entrance to the Silent Chasm, Squirtle couldn't help but look down the cliff. "Wow! This cliff sure is steep!" he whistled, amazed. Charmander and Chikorita thought so too after looking, then they all focused on the task at hand. "Your friend Jumpluff is lost somewhere in this canyon, right?" Charmander asked, to which Jumpluff nodded. "Yes. I'm sorry to trouble you, but please help," he said. "Don't worry, its fine," Chikorita said, then turned to Squirtle and Charmander and said, "We can handle this, right guys?" Both Charmander and Squirtle nodded, then headed for the entrance to the canyon.

"Wait!" Jumpluff suddenly said, catching the team's attention. "Yes? What's the matter?" Charmander asked. "I forgot to mention this," Jumpluff started, "but… Well, this canyon is known as the Silent Chasm, but it's rumored that an amazing monster sleeps here." This caught the attention of Team Go-Getters, as Charmander said, "Did you say… Monster?!" Jumpluff panicked and said, "Yes, but! It is only folklore! And it's also true that Shiftry hasn't returned yet… I just thought that you should know…"

There was a moment of silence after Jumpluff finished, then Charmander cried, "Ah! My stomach! It hurts…" Everyone's attention was directed at him, since it sounded like he was in pain. "What's wrong?!" Jumpluff exclaimed as Charmander slid into a sitting position. "I think it's my stomach. It feels like it cramped up all of a sudden. Owowow…" Charmander groaned. He then turned to Chikorita and Squirtle and asked, "Uh, hey, is anyone else feeling sick too? Any stomach pains?" Chikorita, also feeling a bit worried about what Jumpluff had mentioned about a monster, caught on to what Charmander was saying and said, "He's right. I think I am starting to feel a little sick. What about you, Squirtle?" she asked, turning to the blue turtle. "Huh? I feel fine," he said, shrugging. This caused Charmander and Chikorita to sweat drop, then they suddenly yelled at him, "What's with you, Squirtle?! How dense are you?! If you want to be on this team, then you need to learn to read cues better!" Both Squirtle and Jumpluff were surprised by this outburst, causing Jumpluff to ask, "W-Why are you both yelling at him like that? I thought you both had stomachaches…" This caught Charmander and Chikorita's attention, as they sweat dropped again and Charmander covered for them as he said, "Uh, yeah… I guess it wasn't all that bad. It must've settled down, heh heh…" Chikorita giggled a little too, and Squirtle also had to giggle a bit as well.

"So, anyway, you mentioned that a monster might be living down in the canyon. Do you know what it is or anything like that?" Squirtle asked. "I don't know much about it. It's just an old folktale that I've heard. I don't know how much truth there is behind it," Jumpluff said. Team Go-Getters nodded in understanding, and Charmander said, "Well, it can't be helped. We'll just have to be careful not to run into it if it does exist," and Chikorita and Squirtle nodded in agreement. "My friend should be near the bottom, I believe. Please be careful!" Jumpluff said. "Okay, then. Chikorita, Squirtle, let's go!" Charmander said, and they both said, "Yeah!" They then began to make their way into the Silent Chasm. But as they walked, Charmander thought to himself, "_I didn't want to

sound like a coward, but I don't want Squirtle or Chikorita to end up getting hurt. I couldn't forgive myself if anything happened to them._" Chikorita was also thinking similar thoughts, while Squirtle was determined to make sure to defend his friends if anything were to happen while they were in the canyon.

Silent Chasm: A short while later…

The Silent Chasm was well-named from what Squirtle could tell, since they had to listen very closely for any ambushes coming up behind them, and the fog didn't exactly clear up any as they went down, and was thicker in some places. They encountered several Pokemon as they walked along the side of the cliff, including some Gloom, a pack of Houndour, a swarm of Beedrill, along with several others such as Farfetch'd and Trapinch. They were all sent packing quickly enough though, due to the many moves that Team Go-Getters had learned up to this point, so there was little trouble as they went deeper into the canyon.

When they were about a third of the way down the Silent Chasm, the path they were walking suddenly became dense with fog a ways ahead. Even with Charmander's tail flame, it would be very hard to see where they were going. Suddenly, Squirtle spotted a crack in the rock wall that they might be able to use to bypass the fog and continue down. They decided to give it a try and they squeezed into the crack, guided through the dark by Charmander's fire. As they went further, the passageway got wider and they began to see a light coming from ahead. Soon they got to the source of it to see the walls glowing.

"Wow, what is this?" Chikorita asked, looking at the glowing section of the cave. "It looks like some kind of fluorescent moss. My brother used to talk about occasionally seeing it in caves," Charmander explained. "It sure is pretty," Squirtle commented as they continued on their way. Soon they came to the end of the passage, where they found a hole that looked like it would take them further down. It was wide enough that they could all fit in one at a time, and inch their way down a bit at a time. Squirtle decided to go first this time to make sure it was safe, and found that other than the rocks being slippery, there didn't seem to be anything dangerous down the hole. With that, Charmander went next to give them all a bit of light, with Chikorita bringing up the rear. They went down for a while when suddenly Chikorita lost her grip, falling bottom first on Charmander's head, pushing him down onto Squirtle, causing them to fall the rest of the way. They hit the bottom with a THUMP, the toolbox staying closed but laying on its side next to Squirtle, who was on the bottom of the pile-up, Charmander on top of him and Chikorita above him. Chikorita could only act innocent and utter a simple, "Oopsie."

After recovering and getting off of each other, the team continued through the cave, finding themselves in a water-filled section of the canyon cave. They ran into several more Pokemon as they continued through it, including some Yanma, Poliwag, and Weedle. After wandering through this area, they eventually came across an exit, which led them back out onto the canyon wall. As they looked around to see where they ended up, they found that they had gotten well beyond the dense fog area, as the

fog was less thick where they were, so they were glad that the tunnel had taken them past the fog like they had hoped and were now getting close to the bottom of the Silent Chasm. With that in mind, they continued to search for Jumpluff's friend.

After a few more obstacles, Team Go-Getters made it to the end of the canyon, close to the bottom, just like Jumpluff had said. As they looked for Jumpluff's friend and Shiftry, they were suddenly surprised when Jumpluff's friend floated right over to them. "Hey, we came looking for you. Are you okay?" Charmander asked. This Jumpluff, just a bit smaller than their client, said, "Yes… I'm fine. But… Shiftry… He's in the back." With this information, Team Go-Getters went to the back to find Shiftry lying on the ground.

"Hey! Are you okay, Shiftry? Wake up!" Squirtle exclaimed. Shiftry opened his eyes and struggled to say, "…Urrrgh. Forget about me… You've got to get out of here!" This confused Team Go-Getters, when suddenly the area went pitch-black. "Hey, who turned out the lights?" Squirtle asked. Suddenly, they all heard a loud "Gyaoooooh!" Even in the darkness, they could tell Shiftry was panicking as he shouted, "It's coming! Get away from here!" Suddenly, a new voice, seeming to come from where Shiftry was, said, "Stand aside, you! He thought he could disturb my sleep and get away with it! Well, I have no mercy for meddlers, and that includes you!" After another loud cry, there was a bright flash, and when they could see again, they saw Shiftry being held by a large yellow bird with pointed wings. "Shiftry!" Chikorita exclaimed at this sight. They all looked up at the yellow bird, which went on to say, "I am Zapdos! The embodiment of lightning! If you truly wish to save Shiftry, then come to Mt. Thunder's peak!" And with another loud cry, Zapdos took off, flying above Silent Chasm and heading to the northeast. "Zapdos… So that's what was rumored to be sleeping in the Silent Chasm…" said Charmander, who was both amazed and frightened by the bird.

Later, back in front of Team Go-Getters Team Base

Team Go-Getters stood on the path near their base with Jumpluff and his friend in front of them. "Yay! Thank you for saving my friend!" the client Jumpluff said, happy that they completed the mission. His friend smiled, but then frowned as he said, "But even though I'm safe, Shiftry is in trouble now…" Chikorita wondered what Zapdos meant when he said Shiftry disturbed his sleep and said, "Please, tell us what happened before we got there." The smaller Jumpluff nodded and said, "Well… Shiftry whipped up the wind using his fans… That released me from the rocks, but it also tore a thundercloud in two… And then that large bird appeared in the sky." With the explanation done, Squirtle crossed his arms in thought and said, "Hmm… He said he was Zapdos. Isn't that a legendary Pokemon?" he asked, looking at Charmander and Chikorita.

"You mentioned Zapdos?" a familiar voice said, coming from the direction of Pokemon Square. Everyone looked in that direction to see Team ACT standing there. This gave everyone a bit of a shock as Alakazam, Charizard, and Tyranitar walked over. "Zapdos… It is indeed a legendary Pokemon, one of the three legendary birds. I heard it had been sleeping for a long time," Alakazam explained. "So Shiftry woke it up?" Chikorita

asked. "No," Alakazam said. "The winds that Shiftry created were only the trigger. For starters, the absence of winds there was unnatural. It must've been because of the many recent natural disasters. Zapdos is angered, due to being awoken from its sleep. Shiftry must be saved." Tyranitar turned to Alakazam and said, "It's not going to be easy. Zapdos' electric attacks are very powerful." Alakazam turned to him and said, "I know that. We will need to exercise extreme caution."

While they talked, Squirtle looked at Charmander and Chikorita and said, "We should go too! Shiftry is going to need all the help he can get!" Charmander and Chikorita looked at him, then realized that what he was saying was right, even if they could only help Team ACT. So Charmander said, "Alakazam, we want to help your team rescue Shiftry!" This came as a shock to Alakazam, who turned to them and said, "What?! That is dangerous! Zapdos is powerful. I'm afraid it will be too much for your skill level," he explained. This got Squirtle a bit angry, and he said, "Hey, we aren't that weak! At the very least, we could back you guys up! We're not scared of Zapdos, especially not when a fellow Pokemon is in danger!" Team ACT had to admire their determination and energetic spirit, but they knew that it was likely that even doing what they were suggesting could result in losing their lives. So Charizard asked, "Have you ever been subjected to a powerful electric attack? It leaves you numb and cringing! Still feel like going to challenge Zapdos?" Clearly, Charizard was trying to intimidate them, simply because he didn't want to lose his younger brother. However, Team Go-Getters said it would take more to force them to back down. Tyranitar then asked, "Zapdos is one of the legendary bird Pokemon for a reason, you know. It might even try to eat any of you! Can you face that?" Still, Team Go-Getters refused to be talked out of going to Mt. Thunder to help Shiftry. After a moment, Alakazam said, "It's clear that you have courage. Very well then. Rest up tonight, then tomorrow, our two teams will separately climb Mt. Thunder. We will leave when we are properly prepared for battle. I suggest you do the same, since caution will be needed when dealing with an opponent such as this. Let us find success in rescuing Shiftry!" And with that, Team ACT said their goodbyes and headed home for the night.

After Team ACT left, the members of Team Go-Getters looked at each other, then thrust up towards the sky with their arms/paws as they were determined to do what Alakazam said and find success in their mission tomorrow.

8. Showdown with a Legend

Following Team ACT's departure, Team Go-Getters spent the rest of the day gathering up the supplies they would need for handling Mt. Thunder tomorrow. As the sun went down, they went through their usual evening routine before meeting up at the front of the base before they each headed home. Before they did, they noticed that there had been a late-afternoon delivery, which it turns out were Silver Rank Rescue Badges! All the work they had been doing had finally qualified them as a Silver Rank Rescue Team! Feeling great knowing this, they split off to head home for the night. When they all got to their respective home, they quickly fell asleep for the night.

The next morning…

Squirtle woke up, feeling refreshed after a good night's sleep. He took a quick dip in the water to make sure he was clean and awake, and then got the toolbox and his Pecha Scarf before heading out the front door. Out front, he did a few stretches to ensure he was prepared, and Charmander and Chikorita arrived shortly afterward.

"Good morning, Squirtle! Did you sleep well?" Charmander asked, and Squirtle nodded in agreement. Chikorita thought something looked different about Squirtle as he was nodding, but she just figured it was nothing. Charmander then asked, "We're supposed to head out for Mt. Thunder to help Shiftry out, right?" and Squirtle and Chikorita nodded. "But Alakazam said we should be properly prepared before we head out. We spent the rest of yesterday preparing, but maybe we should see if there's anything else we need before we head out. Or are we already prepared as we are?" Chikorita asked. "Well, either way, let's do our best, just like always!" Charmander said, and Squirtle nodded. They decided to go to Pokemon Square to see if the Kecleon Brothers got anything new that morning before they headed out. They picked up a few extra essentials, stopped by Aunty Kangaskhan's storage warehouse to store some of the things they picked up in the Silent Chasm, dropped by Felicity Bank to drop off the Poke they were still carrying around, checked in on how Jumpluff and his friend were doing, and then headed back past their Rescue Base to begin the trip to Mt. Thunder.

Later…

After leaving the village, Team Go-Getters headed to the northeast, passing the locations of Mirage Woods and Silent Chasm on the way. Due to how far away Mt. Thunder was, they had to stop partway to take a quick break. After a bit more traveling, they finally arrived at the base of Mt. Thunder.

"So this is Mt. Thunder…" Squirtle said, glancing around as he marveled at the height of the mountain. "Yeah, this is it alright," Charmander said. "I wonder if Team ACT is already on their way?" Chikorita turned to him and said, "They could be. We didn't see them while we were in town, but that doesn't mean that they left before we did." She then looked at Mt. Thunder and said, "We should be worried about what we'll do when we run into Zapdos. It's definitely going to be tough, Team ACT or no." Squirtle looked at Charmander and Chikorita and said, "C'mon guys, we came all this way out here to help Shiftry. We can't start getting scared now. We promised to help, so let's stay true to what we promised." Charmander and Chikorita looked at him and nodded, knowing that he was telling the truth. "Right then, team, let's get in there and do our best!" Charmander stated, and Squirtle and Chikorita shouted in agreement. They then walked into the cave to begin climbing Mt. Thunder.

The inside of Mt. Thunder seemed to be a dry cavern, though it seemed that rainwater must have been soaked up by the ground as they could see patches of grass growing as they walked. It was also very hard to see inside, the darkness leaving them unable to even see their feet. So

Squirtle and Chikorita had to stay very close to Charmander in order to see where they were going, as even that didn't provide the team with much light. And it made them that much more likely to get ambushed by the Pokemon that were living in the cave. Thankfully for them, it seemed that this part of the mountain was deserted, as they didn't get attacked while they were trying to find the way up.

After some stumbling around in the dark, Team Go-Getters found a staircase that led up to a higher area of the mountain. It also began to get brighter when they reached the top, so could use their eyes normally and not have to strain themselves in order to watch out for attacks. Pokemon began to appear from this point onward, as they began to see Weedle, male Nidoran, Electrike, Cacnea, and Pidgeotto. Still, these Pokemon were no match for the Silver Rank Rescue Team, as they breezed right through them, even the ones that had an advantage over some of the members. As they snaked their way up the stairs through the cave, it began to get brighter as light was coming down from somewhere up ahead, though the terrain was getting rougher as well. They also began to see more Pokemon, such as Beedrill, Electabuzz, Stantler, Ampharos, Gligar, Manectric, and Growlithe. These Pokemon were more suited to living in these tough conditions and presented more of a challenge than the Pokemon they ran into on the lower floors. Even so, Team Go-Getters persevered, dealing with the challenges they were presented until they found themselves in a small room that had water on both sides and a rock shaped like a Kangaskhan in the middle.

"What's that rock over there?" Squirtle asked. "It's called a Kangaskhan Rock," Charmander explained, "It means that this is a safe area, which means that we can stop and take a break when we see one in a dungeon." Chikorita then said, "If we happen to get knocked out past this point, we'll be sent back here by some kind of powerful force. We'll still lose some of our items and all of our money, but we won't have to start over at the bottom. But that only happens until we actually leave Mt. Thunder ourselves." Squirtle nodded in understanding, although he wondered what kind of force it was that caused a Rescue Team to reawaken back at this specific location or back at their Rescue Base. Still, he decided not to press the issue, as he figured Charmander and Chikorita didn't know any more than he did. With the explanations and questions done, Charmander, Chikorita, and Squirtle decided to stop in this area for a little bit, since they didn't have to fear getting attacked by any angry Pokemon. They took out some of the apples and berries they were carrying in the toolbox and enjoyed a quick snack while also making some light conversation in order to ease the tension they were feeling from getting close to the peak of Mt. Thunder. After they were done eating and were fully recovered from their resting, they packed up and began to walk towards the end of the passageway, past the Kangaskhan Rock.

As they got closer to the end of the passageway, they began to see the light starting to shine brighter, and it soon became apparent that they were going to be heading outside shortly. After passing through a cavern that was like a rocky maze, encountering some more Pokemon that they had seen earlier, they found the exit. As expected, they found themselves walking on the slopes up to the peak of Mt. Thunder. They could see the clouds flashing lightning in the distance, as well as seeing some

withering trees, dying bushes, and some cracks filled with water dotting the path to the top. Thankfully, there were no Pokemon that dared to live out here, because one good attack would've sent them on a long trip to the bottom of the mountain. So they simply went up the winding path to the top in a circular, tower-like fashion until they came to a plateau that seemed to be cut into the ground. They had finally reached the summit of Mt. Thunder.

"Well, this is the peak of Mt. Thunder, but where's Zapdos?" Chikorita asked. "For that matter, where's Team ACT? We didn't see them anywhere while we were climbing, inside or out," Charmander added. Everyone was silent for a few moments, then Squirtle decided to try calling out to see if Zapdos was close by. "Hey, Zapdos! Are you here?! We came to rescue Shiftry! Come out if you can hear me!" As if waiting for the proper cue, there was a flash of light, followed by Zapdos crying, "Gyaooooooooh!" And then suddenly, it quickly swooped down in front of Team Go-Getters, giving them a bit of a shock.

"So you have come! I warned you that I would have no mercy for meddlers!" Zapdos growled. While intimidated at Zapdos' words and his appearing suddenly, the members of Team Go-Getters refused to be scared off after coming so far. "I'm not scared… I'm not scared… We can defeat him!" Charmander muttered to himself in order to prepare for the battle. Chikorita muttered something similar, while Squirtle just took a deep breath in order to calm his nerves. Feeling more relaxed, Charmander asked, "Zapdos, where is Shiftry?!" Zapdos simply glared at him and said, "He's fine… for now! But what difference does it make to you loudmouths?" The three Pokemon in front of Zapdos said all together with a pose, "Because we're a Pokemon Rescue Team, Team Go-Getters!!!" Zapdos simply stated, "Whatever. You must be determined if you think to utter such words. Then Team Go-Getters will answer to my great and righteous fury! Prepare yourselves!" And with a flash of lightning from behind Zapdos, the battle began!

Squirtle attempted to hit Zapdos with an Ice Beam, but Zapdos used Agility to increase his speed, allowing him to evade the attack easily. He then tried to counter by hitting everyone with a Thundershock, but Squirtle jumped in front of Chikorita and Charmander and used Protect. The power of the Thundershock almost caused his protective green barrier to fizzle out and strike him, but he prevailed and stopped it from hitting them. As soon as the barrier went down, Charmander leapt over Squirtle and delivered a Flamethrower, since Zapdos needed a second to move after launching his Thundershock. While he was doing this, Chikorita set up a Reflect and then a Light Screen, in order to ward off some of the damage from Zapdos' attacks. The battle kept switching between one side launching, defending, or enhancing themselves, followed by the other side responding accordingly. Eventually, Zapdos' Agility made him very hard to keep up with, and so he launched a Drill Peck that shattered Chikorita's Reflect and struck them all hard. He then quickly followed up with a Thundershock before the team could even land, so even Chikorita suffered quite a bit. When the painful jolt ended, they all slammed into the ground hard, paralyzed and unable to get up as Zapdos landed in front of them.

"Hmph! It was a brave and determined effort that you three put up, but you should know never to go up against anything out of your league, especially when you don't have any real strength. And so, I'll finish you off and send you home to consider that!" Zapdos growled, gathering up energy to unleash a Thunderbolt on them. While he was gathering up as much energy as he could to make sure they were all taken out, the team was struggling to shake off the paralysis and get out of the way, but was failing miserably.

As they kept trying, Squirtle thought to himself, "_Agh… He's so strong… He's definitely a legendary Pokemon; he's tougher than anything we've encountered so far. But…_" Squirtle clenched his left hand into a fist and propped it up, "_We're not going to lose to him!_" As he thought this, he felt something deep inside of him, as if it began to reawaken after a long time of being dormant. "_As long as we can stand up and face Zapdos,_" he thought as the feeling spread throughout his body, "_Team Go-Getters is never going to give up!_" Suddenly, the paralysis constricting his body vanished and he rushed at a speed considerable to a Linoone, slamming into Zapdos with a powerful Tackle attack! This powerful and painful hit threw Zapdos off balance and caused him to fall on his back. While he was recovering from the shock, Squirtle dashed over with his new speed and got Oran and Cheri Berries from the toolbox and gave them to Charmander and Chikorita, who perked up after chewing them down.

After Charmander, Chikorita, and Zapdos had all gotten back up, they were all a bit astounded at Squirtle's appearance. While he physically looked no different than he did normally, he was now covered by a glowing light blue aura, including his eyes. For some reason, the part on top and back of his head was positioned slightly above it and seemed to be waving in the wind, like there was supposed to be something there. It seemed to give off a calming light as Charmander and Chikorita, though still in shock, rose up to resume the battle with Zapdos.

Upon seeing Charmander and Chikorita get up, Zapdos snapped back to himself and decided to make the little turtle pay for whatever he did, suspecting that Squirtle must've activated his ability, Torrent, meaning he was close to defeat. He quickly charged up a Thundershock and fired it at Squirtle, causing Chikorita and Charmander to tell him to move, but at the last second, he took off quickly, reaching Zapdos' side just as the Thundershock hit the ground, and blasted Zapdos with a Water Pulse from below, which was laced with the same glowing aura Squirtle had covering his body. The attack seemed to increase in power because of the aura and also caused Zapdos to become confused. With Zapdos trying to figure out where he was, Squirtle ran back to Charmander and Chikorita, at a normal speed this time, and they quickly got the message. Lining up in front of Zapdos, they got ready to finish the battle up.

"Give it to him! Flamethrower!" Charmander shouted.

"Add in Magical Leaf! Ha!" Chikorita exclaimed.

"And top it off with Ice Beam!" Squirtle called.

As each of them said this, they unleashed the attack in question, sending a wall of power rushing towards Zapdos, whose guard was down due to just figuring out that he was on Mt. Thunder and engaged in a battle. Having figured this out too late, he was suffered a LOT of damage from Team Go-Getters' combination shot. When it ended, Zapdos was struggling to stay standing at the edge of the plateau, not far from Team Go-Getters. Squirtle was also having trouble standing up, as the aura around him disappeared after the attack and he immediately got exhausted, like someone forced him to run a whole marathon. The questions Charmander and Chikorita had had for him were lost at seeing him breathing hard and trying to stand up. As they were trying to help Squirtle and Zapdos was keeping himself upright, Team ACT suddenly appeared on the scene.

"What is going on here?" Alakazam wondered, catching Team Go-Getters' attention. They looked back to see Alakazam, Charizard, and Tyranitar standing there, having just made it up to the peak. Zapdos caught everyone's attention then, as suddenly he seemed to be charging up electricity in his body. When the charge was complete, the electricity sparkled around him and he began to beat his wings, lifting off the ground. Charizard quickly pushed the injured Team Go-Getters out of harm's way and glared at Zapdos, saying, "You still want to fight? I think I can handle that myself!" But Zapdos simply landed and said, "No. I'm done fighting for now. I've had some fun and I'm calm again. Shiftry is free to go." He took to the air, flew off for a few minutes, and returned with Shiftry in one of his talons. As he landed, he glanced over at Team Go-Getters and said, "You kids… You're more than I thought you would be. This was certainly a fun battle." Squirtle smiled at this and said, "Hey, sometimes you just have to throw your rage around until it's gone. You just need to find someone who can take it all and help you deal with it." Zapdos smiled and nodded, then said, "Yes. But we'll see about next time we meet. Next time, I will go all out, now that I know what you three are capable of. I suggest you be prepared for that! Train hard, so that next we meet, we can battle without any anger or holding back!" He then took off once again, this time flying off into the distance.

With Zapdos gone, everyone ran over to Shiftry, who was just lying on the ground but still seemed to be moving. "Are you OK?" Charizard asked. Shiftry stood up and looked around for a second before saying, "Ugh… Uh, yeah… I am, somehow…" Despite looking to have been shaken by the whole ordeal, Shiftry seemed little worse for the wear. Team Go-Getters was happy to see this, Squirtle even saying, "I'm glad you're okay Shiftry! We were worried about you!" Charmander and Chikorita nodded in agreement with this statement, which surprised Shiftry inwardly. Tyranitar then looked over at Team Go-Getters and said, "But that was a real surprise. Just that whole driving off Zapdos yourselves." Charizard nodded and said, "Yeah, I didn't see what happened, but it looks like you've all got some real chemistry among yourselves. And you must have more strength than a Rescue Team like you can show, eh Brother?" he grinned. Chikorita gave a side glance at Charmander, who seemed to be embarrassed by what his brother said, but Squirtle just glanced away, not sure what to say or do. Alakazam noticed this and spoke up, "I sensed it back when we first met… Perhaps… You're not really a Pokemon, are you?" he asked Squirtle. Squirtle was shocked by this and said, "You mean you can tell just by looking at me?! But you're right. I'm not really a Squirtle." Chikorita

nodded and added, "He says that he's actually a human." Despite saying she believed him, she secretly hoped it was not true, even with what had just occurred. Still these words came as a shock to the other Pokemon except for Alakazam.

"Is that possible? Can a human really become a Pokemon?" Tyranitar asked Squirtle. "I don't know. All I know is I woke up in the forest like this and I can't remember anything other than the fact that I'm a human," he said, somewhat sadly. Charmander looked at Squirtle, feeling sorry for him, and then asked Alakazam, "Alakazam, we heard you know a lot about the world. Do you have any idea why Squirtle would just wake up as a Pokemon?" He looked at Charmander a moment, then said, "No. I'm afraid I can't determine that." He then remembered that they could try talking to someone who might know more. "However, there might be a way to uncover the truth," he started. At Team Go-Getters' looks, he continued, "There is a place called the Hill of the Ancients. There lives a Pokemon who stares into the sun all day for insight into the future… His name is Xatu, and he may be able to help your friend." Charmander nodded and said, "Okay! Then that's where we'll go." Squirtle then looked at him and asked, "After lunch?" Charmander and Chikorita giggled a bit, then Charmander said, "Yeah, okay. We'll go after lunch. We were probably going to stop at the village anyway," he stated, which Squirtle looked happy about. Chikorita turned to Shiftry and said, "Shiftry, you come too. Let's head back." Shiftry cast an uncertain eye to her and said, "Uh, yeah… We should, I guess…" The four of them then left the plateau to head down the mountain, leaving Team ACT alone.

As they watched Team Go-Getters leave, Charizard leaned over to Alakazam and said, "Alakazam. I know you, and I think you know something that you're not telling them. You do, do you not?" Alakazam crossed his arms and said, "There is something… But I don't believe it concerns that boy just yet. He may act a bit odd, but there's definitely no hatred in his mind. So for now, it will go unspoken. For their sake…"

I hope that you enjoyed this chapter. I was in a bit of a slump when I wrote this, so it feels a little out of sorts to me. But I figured it would take a while before I got out of my slump, so I thought it was okay and decided to post it. Feel free to review if you wish.

Peace and love to everyone!

9. The Wise Bird of the Ancients

After getting back from Mt. Thunder, Team Go-Getters met up with Shiftry's Nuzleaf teammates. They were very grateful for what Team Go-Getters did, so they gave the team a reward for helping their leader. Shiftry seemed to be lost in thought throughout the trip and the return, but not enough to forget to thank the trio for saving his life. They said they were going to talk to Jumpluff before they tried to find some more work, though it didn't seem like Shiftry was in the mood to head out again just yet as Chikorita noted. After they left, Squirtle decided to

grab some lunch for everyone while Charmander and Chikorita asked around about the Hill of Ancients. By the time Squirtle had enough for everyone to have, Charmander and Chikorita were done asking around, so they met up with him at the front of the base to eat and discuss what they had found out.

"So, to sum it up, after we did some checking around," Charmander said, having mentioned who they talked to while eating, "the Hill of the Ancients is apparently located in the Great Canyon, which is to the south of here." Squirtle nodded in understanding, since he couldn't open his mouth since he had just started chewing a rice ball. After a little while, they were done eating, and all the rice balls, apple slices, tea, and soup were gone. All that was left were some empty wooden plates, bowls, cups, and a few pairs of chopsticks.

"Well, that was delicious," Chikorita commented. She then stood up, "We should go to the Great Canyon now. We still have plenty of supplies that we'll be fine if we run into any problems," she explained. Charmander agreed as he and Squirtle stood up. "Alright then, let's go! We're off to the Great Canyon!" he said as he and Chikorita began walking, but Squirtle stayed where he was, saying something quietly. Charmander seemed to hear him speaking, as he stopped and looked back at Squirtle, asking, "Squirtle? What's the matter?" Squirtle looked up at him, gave a quick smile and said, "It's okay, don't worry about anything." Chikorita didn't buy it for a second and said, "You were saying something, weren't you? Something is bothering you if you're doing that." She softened her expression and said, "Come on, you can tell us what's wrong." Squirtle gave a soft sigh, then said, "Okay, why do you want to go out to the Great Canyon so badly?" Charmander and Chikorita looked at each other, then back at Squirtle and Charmander asked, "Why? Why would you ask something like that?" Squirtle scratched his head, brushing over something soft and slightly fine, and said, "Well, are you fine taking time out of rescue work for that?" At this they smiled and Charmander said, "Of course. Helping out others is important, especially when you're talking about a friend. After all, you are our friend, aren't you Squirtle?" Squirtle didn't say anything, but he did slightly nod. Chikorita then walked up behind him saying, "That's what this whole Rescue Team is all about. We do our best for each other as well. So come on! Let's go do our best!" she said, putting the toolbox on his shoulder and pushing him in the direction of the village outskirts, Charmander following behind them.

The trip to the Great Canyon was a pretty long one. After leaving the village outskirts, Team Go-Getters set out east so they wouldn't waste time trying to find a way to cross the cove directly. By heading east towards the forest where Mirage Woods was located, they were able to go around it, but they were still a ways away from their destination. Once they got close to the forest, they began to walk along the edge of the cove, giving them a great view of the ocean as they walked. By the time they got to a patch of woods near the plains they had to cross, it was already getting close to nighttime. So they found a suitable place in the woods where they wouldn't run into any angry Ursaring and camped for the night. After a dinner and a good night's sleep in the clearing, they

buried the remains of their camp fire so there wouldn't be anything left to burn and continued on their way.

After leaving the patch of forest, they came across a vast plain that would only be inhabited by Pokemon that could stand living in a desert region. As they trudged across it, they noted that rain must've run down the rocks into the plain they were walking on, as they could see a more rocky area off to the east. Despite the traveling being a bit rough, they made it across, arriving at the foot of the Great Canyon around mid-afternoon.

"Well, here we are. The Great Canyon," Chikorita stated. "It sure is huge. I can see why they might give it that name," Squirtle commented. "Yeah," Charmander agreed. He then turned to his teammates and said, "The Hill of the Ancients is located at the top of the canyon, according to what I heard from Alakazam and my older brother. That's where we'll find Xatu, so we need to find some safe areas in this canyon that we can climb up, okay guys?" They nodded, though everyone's feet were still sore from crossing the rocky desert plain. Still they knew they would have to deal with it if they were going to get any answers. So Squirtle said, "Well, like you guys said, let's do our best, right?!" They voiced their agreement, and entered the canyon to begin searching for a way up, not realizing that someone was following them.

As they stepped into the canyon, they could see it was even bigger than it looked on the outside. The bottom of it looked a bit different from what they expected as well, since they saw crevices that held water at the bottom, as well as green grasses growing out from the rocky ground. As they walked, they tried to locate a suitable area to start climbing, hoping to find something low enough that they could grasp that wasn't too sharp and had a few ledges above it that they could walk on. As they searched, they ran into some Pokemon that were quite used to living in the canyon, such as Skiploom, Dunsparce, Phanpy, and Doduo. Since they lived in rough conditions, they provided a suitable battle whenever Team Go-Getters ran into them.

After about an hour of walking, Team Go-Getters finally came across a ledge that looked suitable enough to climb up. First Charmander went up to make sure it was okay, followed by Squirtle when Charmander confirmed that it was, who helped Chikorita climb up. Following the path they were now on, they continued on their way up the canyon, watching out for wild Pokemon that might try to push them off.

After some more walking, they began to close in on the Hill of the Ancients, getting closer to the top of the Great Canyon. They had run into some more Pokemon as they climbed, being chased by Breloom, almost stunned by a Vileplume's Stun Spore, almost had their badges stolen by some Murkrow, almost got ambushed by a Cacturne, and had trouble outsmarting a Noctowl. But still, they were making progress up to the top, being close to the top at this point as they were trying to figure out the best way to cross to the side of the canyon where the Hill of the Ancients was located.

"So what would the best way to get across be?" Squirtle asked. "Do we try to do some old-school jumping across those rocks to the other side, or do we see if there's a way further up?" Charmander and Chikorita were also confused on what the best way to solve this dilemma would be. Eventually, they decided to check ahead to see if there was another way to cross. After some walking, they came to the top of the Great Canyon, though they still needed to cross if they wanted to get to the Hill of the Ancients. And it was kind of hard to think, because being at the top of the canyon put them in full view of the evening sun, the heat beginning to get to Chikorita and Squirtle, though it also meant that it was going to start getting cool once the sun went down.

"Hang in there, guys; we're so close to our goal! We just have to think about the situation and we'll find a way across!" Charmander tried to reassure Squirtle and Chikorita, since they were sitting down next to a rock that was somewhat out of the sun's rays in order to help keep cool. As they sat next to each other, Squirtle and Chikorita tried to think about the problem facing them, but Chikorita was having a little trouble with this since she realized she was sitting right next to Squirtle. She didn't have to do much thinking, though, as Squirtle spotted a possible solution to the problem.

"Hey, look at that dead tree over there," Squirtle said, pointing to an old tree that had long since lost its leaves and had trouble surviving due to being exposed to so much sun and not enough rain. They looked at it and caught on to what Squirtle was suggesting. They all walked over to it to examine it, seeing that it seemed to be pretty firm and might be the right length for them to use as a bridge to the other side. Working together, they tried to force the tree out of the ground, budging it some, which was more than they expected, before they heard the sound of buzzing, causing them to stop. Looking at where it was coming from, they had their eyes hit with the sun, as a Heracross attempted to hit them with Megahorn, using the sun as cover. However, it ended up hitting the tree instead, since Team Go-Getters figured that they should try to get out of the way of the attacker. The Megahorn ended up dislodging the tree without sending it flying off a cliff. This also left the Heracross dazed, so Charmander gave it a light Flamethrower to send it back to its nest.

"Well, he was rather helpful actually," Chikorita noted, as the tree was now on its side near the path they needed to go back down. Before deciding how to get the tree to do what they hoped it could do, they decided to go back down to the gap in the canyon and examine it and consider how best to go about getting across. Once they reached it, they checked everything that was essential to using the tree, including how long the gap was and how they were going to get the tree to serve as a bridge over this gap. Eventually, they decided that the tree could help them reach the other side, but they would have to be careful about getting it down to this point. One slip would mean finding another way across. Working together, they pushed and pulled the tree down to where the gap wasn't as wide and slowly got it to face the direction they needed. With that, they pushed it out across the gap until it made contact with the other side, then carefully walked across one at a time

until they were on the other side, where the Hill of the Ancients was located.

"Hey, did anyone else see the frayed ropes back near the rocks in the gap? It almost looked like there might've been a bridge there at some point," Squirtle said once there were across and climbing again. "Yeah, I noticed that too. And those ropes looked pretty sturdy, so they couldn't have broken on their own," Charmander agreed. "But who would go to all that trouble? And why?" Chikorita wondered, to which no one had an answer to. Instead of asking questions about something they didn't know about, they went back to climbing, the Hill of the Ancients not much farther ahead. Not far behind them, a shadowy figure growled at Team Go-Getters managing to get past its attempt to force them to turn back. It didn't know what they were doing here, but had decided to mess with them all the same.

After climbing up the rest of the way, Squirtle, Charmander, and Chikorita finally arrived at the top, standing atop the Hill of the Ancients.

"Here we are, the Hill of the Ancients…" Charmander said softly. They all glanced around, noticing that the sun didn't shine directly in their faces as it did before. Suddenly, they all noticed a bird standing directly in the path of the sun, seemingly staring at it. "Is that Xatu over there?" Squirtle asked. "Not sure. Let's go see," Charmander said. They walked up behind the bird, and Chikorita said, "Excuse us, but are you Xatu?" The bird made no movement or noise, so Chikorita walked closer and said, "Hello?" Still no response. Squirtle looked up at the Pokemon and wondered, "Maybe he can't hear us?" He walked up to his side, looking at him, then walked in front of him and said, "HELLO?!" Even with Squirtle shouting, there was no response, so Squirtle walked back around him, confused.

"I don't get it. He's not making any response at all," Squirtle said to Charmander and Chikorita. "Yeah, maybe he's asleep on his feet?" Charmander wondered. "With his eyes open? Wow," Squirtle commented. "His eyes are open?" Chikorita asked, and Squirtle nodded, causing her to shiver slightly at the thought of sleeping like that. "What should we do guys?" Squirtle asked. They pondered this for a minute before Chikorita said, "Well, we could try tickling him." Squirtle glanced at Xatu, then said, "Well… okay. We could try it." He walked over to Xatu's side and started tickling him under his wing. He kept this up for a little bit before he dropped his arms, groaning. He walked back to them and said, "Still nothing." This caused them to groan too, not sure what to do now. Suddenly, they heard a snort, and looked back at Xatu. All of a sudden, he burst out laughing, as if Squirtle were tickling him right now. This caused them to sweat drop, wondering why he was laughing now. "Maybe… he concentrates on the sun too much to know what's going on?" Squirtle suggested.

"KWAAAAAAAAAH!" he shouted, raising his wings and scaring the heck out of everyone. Dropping his wings, he said, "Behold… The sun setting on the horizon…" He then turned around and said, "Indeed. I am Xatu. You know of my true identity… You are not an ordinary sort…" Everyone sweated some

more at this remark. "Guessed your identity? Isn't that a little much?" Charmander asked. "…No," Xatu said. "This much I can tell. You there," he said, looking at Squirtle. "You are no ordinary Pokemon. You are… actually a human, yes?" This came as a shock to Team Go-Getters, especially Charmander and Chikorita, who secretly hoped that Squirtle being a human wasn't true, especially Chikorita. "You can tell?! How?!" Squirtle asked. Xatu turned his back to them and said, "All day… I stare at the sun, unblinking. It gives me sight for all things." He turned back to the three Pokemon and said, "The past and the future as well." Charmander then walked up to Xatu and said, "If you know Xatu, tell us, please!" He then looked at Squirtle before turning back to Xatu and said, "That's my and Chikorita's friend, Squirtle. Our friend woke up one morning a few weeks ago as he is now, without any memory of his former life. Do you know anything about that, Xatu?"

Looking at the three, Xatu said, "The calamities of nature… There have been many quite recently. The reason is because the world's balance is upset." He then looked at Squirtle again and said, "And you waking up as a Pokemon… The two are tied together, inseparably so." Chikorita instantly perked up at this and said, "Are you saying that Squirtle waking up as a Pokemon and the natural disasters are related? How?!" Xatu closed his eyes and said no more. "Hey, why did you just stop talking?! What is it? Please, tell us, Xatu!" Charmander said. Slowly, Xatu continued, "I can also sense a powerful aura coming from you. It has been locked away within you since you became a Pokemon and you've forgotten how to wield it. Perhaps in time, you will remember how to use it. But… there are bigger concerns right now." Even with his eyes closed, Xatu's face wore a look of fear. "The world's balance must be corrected, or the worst shall befall our world." This made everyone also fear, as Chikorita said, "What?! The worst will befall our world?" Xatu turned away and said, "I see it… Every day… One of the possible futures for our world… I fear it. The world's destruction." Everyone was speechless at that, letting it all sink in and fearing it as well.

Meanwhile, hidden safely out of sight near the Hill of the Ancients, the shadowy figure had heard everything, and instantly recognized what Xatu said.

"Heh heh heh! So that's it! A strong aura… A former human… And tied to the natural disasters of this world…" The figure's face sported a wide, evil smirk. "Well, well, well. I believe this will come in handy! It should be interesting to watch indeed! Mwa ha ha!" And with that, the figure left the safety of its hiding place and headed towards the entrance of the Great Canyon, aiming for Pokemon Square…

10. The Legend of Ninetales

After meeting Xatu, Team Go-Getters left him as he turned back to the sun, hoping to see some hope for the future if he looked there. By the time they got to the bottom, it was already night out, so they found an alcove in the rock and camped there for the night. The next day, they exited the canyon and spent most of the day crossing the desert plain and making their way back along the edge of the coast. The whole trip, nobody

really said much due to thinking about everything they had heard from Xatu the other day. They arrived at the front of their Team Base as the sun began to set, having had little happen during the whole trek back. Instead of eating in the Team Base like they usually did, they all simply broke off in front of the base and went to their own respective homes to eat dinner.

As he ate, Squirtle was still thinking of the things Xatu had told the team. How the world's balance was upset and that if it wasn't corrected, it would lead to the world's destruction. He also thought of what Xatu mentioned about his aura and how it was locked in his body since he had awakened in this world. It was a lot of information, and from what Xatu said, it didn't seem like there was much time to sort out all of the little details. However, he knew that they just had to keep their heads held high and work towards figuring the problem out, one bit at a time. By this time, night had fallen, so Squirtle removed his Pecha Scarf and crawled onto his rock to sleep.

Meanwhile, some ways away from the Team Base, Charmander and Chikorita were still awake in their respective homes, not sure how to take the information they had been given. It all sounded so ominous to them.

"_I don't understand,_" Charmander thought to himself. "_What does Squirtle originally being a human but waking up as he is now have to do with the world's balance? And what was Xatu talking about when he mentioned Squirtle's aura? Was he referring to what happened to Squirtle back at Mt. Thunder when we were fighting Zapdos? It's just so confusing, and… Well, I don't really know what to make of it all…_" Shaking his head, Charmander decided that he should try to get some sleep, so he crawled onto his bed and tried to get himself to fall asleep.

Chikorita was also having similar thoughts, as she tried to clear her head and fall asleep. "_The balance of the world is upset… And Squirtle is supposed to be connected to it somehow… But why? I'm sure it's not normal to go to sleep one night and then wake up in the morning with no memory and being a Pokemon, but I don't see what that means for the world. And I don't believe that he would want anything like all these natural disasters to befall us all. *sigh* So confusing._" Hoping her head would clear up some in the morning, Chikorita drifted off to sleep on her bed of leaves.

As the members of Team Go-Getters slept through the night, Squirtle began to experience another dream as he snoozed.

**Squirtle's Dream**

Squirtle sighed as he rested his head in the lap of a Bibarel. The weather was just perfect in his dream. The sun was shining brightly, clouds floated across the sky in all shapes and sizes, and the Pokemon in the forest were enjoying this lovely weather, all singing or just generally having fun. He even felt himself beginning to nod off with some of the other Pokemon in this forest.

"_AH! Wake up, it's falling!_" _Squirtle was suddenly woken rather abruptly at this shout. _"_Falling? What's falling?_"_ he asked. He looked up into the sky where Bibarel was pointing and saw an object rocketing across the sky, moving so fast it left a trail in its wake. _"_What is that thing?_"_ Squirtle wondered, watching it fall from the sky. He began to panic when he realized it was coming down towards him and the Pokemon in the clearing! He shouted for everyone to run, then attempted to get away from the area. The object was coming too fast, because as he started to get away, it came down in the center of the clearing with a loud KA-BOOM!!!_

The force of the landing created a small crater and knocked Squirtle off of his feet, slightly scratching his body. As he tried to stand up, he became aware that something was rising out of the crater and turned his head around to look at it. His vision was blurry due to being thrown off by the explosion, so he had trouble registering the image.

"_A-Are you… a Pokemon?_"_ he managed to ask, but the figure gave no response. Suddenly, Squirtle felt his strength leave him and he fainted._

**Blackness covered Squirtle's vision. And then…**

The sun shone through the back window of the base, striking Squirtle's body as he dragged himself from the world of dreams. Strangely, he felt like he was just regaining consciousness after he had been shocked or beaten with a heavy bat into submission. He rubbed his eyes to try to get the sleep out of them, then sat for a moment to think about what he had seen last night. He had had some dreams like that every now and then that felt real, though he noted that it had been a little while since he last saw the dream with the swirling colors. Shaking his head, he stood up and went to get a drink of water. With that done, he looked at his reflection and noticed what looked like fuzz on the top of his head. It was hard to see unless you looked really carefully, but it almost looked like blue hair, the same blue as his head, arms, and legs. Deciding not to worry about it, he went to the toolbox and grabbed his scarf, tying it around his neck, and then put the toolbox on. He left the Team Base, noticing that Charmander and Chikorita hadn't shown up. They showed up after he waited for a few minutes.

"Good morning, Squirtle," Charmander said, though his voice indicated he had something on his mind. "Um, I wanted to ask you something before we went to work today." Squirtle nodded to let Charmander know he could ask. "What do you think of what Xatu told us? Does it bother you?" Squirtle glanced at the ground for a second to think about it, then said, "A little bit, but not much." This seemed to be not what Chikorita was expecting him to say, as she said, "How can you say that?! Don't joke, Squirtle, this is serous! Xatu said that you being a Pokemon is connected to the reason why the world's balance is upset! And you say that you're only a little bit worried?" Squirtle and Charmander looked at her, not understanding her sudden outburst. She looked between the two of them, then suddenly caught on. "Oh, I see. You want to try to keep our spirits high, don't you?" At this, Squirtle nodded warmly to show that was exactly what he was trying to do. "Sorry, Squirtle. I guess I overreacted there," she said, and then Charmander said, "Well, I might've said

something if you didn't, but I get it now too." Everyone felt better, understanding each other the way they always did.

Charmander looked back at Squirtle and said, "I wish there was something we could do. But that's hard since there's something I don't understand." Chikorita and Squirtle looked at him, wondering what that was. "The, uh… The world's balance… What is that?" he asked. They looked at him wondering what he meant, and he said, "I mean, yeah, we know that when it's out of balance, it causes all the natural disasters we've been seeing, but what is it physically? How are you supposed to fix it?" They could understand what Charmander was getting at, but they were just as lost on that as he was. After a few minutes of silence, Chikorita spoke up, "Well, I guess we'll just have to keep doing what we can to help out. One problem at a time, right?" Squirtle and Charmander agreed, then they set out for Pokemon Square and the Pelipper Post Office.

After crossing the bridge into town, Team Go-Getters passed the Kecleon Brothers shop and one of the village houses before stopping at the sight of the town square. They saw Lombre, Bellsprout, and Snubbull standing atop the multi-colored circular stone that served as the center of the village, talking about something.

"I'm kind of shocked myself," Lombre was saying as the members of Team Go-Getters watched. "I always believe that it was only a legend, nothing more," Snubbull added. "But could there be some truth behind it? I'm having a hard time believing that to be the case," Bellsprout told them. At this point, Squirtle, Charmander, and Chikorita decided to see what they were talking about.

"Hey, what's going on, you guys?" Squirtle asked. They turned to Team Go-Getters and Lombre said, "Oh, well, you know the old story about Ninetales? That whole legend thing?" The trio looked at each other for a moment, then turned back and Charmander said, "No…" Lombre then said, "What, you haven't heard it before? It's one of those old fairy tales the elders tell all the children in the village. How you'll get cursed if you ever grab one of Ninetales' tails." Snubbull then said, "All this time, everyone just left it as that. But lately, it's been rumored that it actually happened." Bellsprout stood relaxed as he said, "Well, like Snubbull said, it's just a rumor going around. I wouldn't start believing it because of that, because I certainly don't. Well, not yet, anyway." Lombre then turned back to Team Go-Getters and said, "If you're interested in hearing it, you should go talk to Elder Whiscash. He's… Well, you know where he is. He gave you guys your first rescue job, after all. Heh heh," he chuckled, remembering that day. "We will, thank you," Charmander said. With that, they headed for Whiscash's pond, leaving the three Pokemon in the square to their business.

As Team Go-Getters headed for the pond, they saw Pikachu, Pichu, and Raichu heading for the pond as well. "Hey, Pikachu, Pichu, Raichu!" Charmander called. The three of them turned around to see Team Go-Getters waving while walking towards them. "Hey, it's Team Go-Getters!" Pichu cried out in joy. "Hey, it's been a while since we've seen you, hasn't it? What have you guys been up to?" Pikachu asked. "Oh, just a lot of heavy work mostly," Chikorita told them. "But we did get promoted again!

Look, we're Silver Rank now!" Charmander said, and the team showed them their badges. "Oh, that's so cool! Great job, you guys!" Pichu exclaimed. "So what have you three been up to?" Squirtle asked. "Well, mostly Pikachu and Pichu have been helping me find a place and get settled," Raichu explained. "Yeah, I've decided to live here and see how things are. Right now, we were going over to Elder Whiscash's pond to hear some folklore." Chikorita looked at them and said, "Well, so were we! Why don't we all go?" Everyone agreed to this and headed out on the stones to where Elder Whiscash liked to settle in his pond.

"Ah… Such a wonderful day… And hopefully, I won't sense any natural disasters for a while," Elder Whiscash sighed, settling on the rocky surface of the pond to enjoy the weather. Suddenly, he noticed a group of Pokemon walking up to him, and recognized them as Team Go-Getters, Pichu, Big Brother Pikachu, and Cousin Raichu. "Oh! So nice to see you all together! Is there anything I can do for you all?" he asked everyone. "We came out to hear your folklore, Elder Whiscash," Pikachu said. "Ah, you wish to hear me tell old folklore?" he inquired. "Yeah, can you tell us about the Ninetales Legend, sir?" Squirtle asked, respecting the elder. "Hohoho. There's no need for formalities. Please everyone, take a seat and I will recount the tale," Elder Whiscash told the group. Everyone found a comfortable spot on the rock and listened carefully as they sat.

"There once lived a Pokemon by the name of Ninetales," Elder Whiscash began. "Now, Ninetales had many tails, all of them said to be imbued with psychic powers. It was said that anyone who grabbed a tail without Ninetales knowing or offering the tail would be struck with a curse. But there was someone so foolish to grab a tail. And it was a human." Pichu raised his paw and asked, "A human?" Whiscash nodded and said, "Yes, a human. As one might expect, the human who grabbed the tail was subjected to the Curse of Ninetales. However, when the curse was cast, a Pokemon named Gardevoir shielded the human, sacrificing herself to absorb the curse." Charmander, one who was not sure on what to make of humans, asked, "Why? Why would that Pokemon, Gardevoir, do that?" Whiscash waved his whiskers and said, "To Gardevoir, that human was her partner. Humans and Pokemon have long held strong bonds together. Or rather…" Elder Whiscash trailed off until Chikorita asked, "Um, about humans? Aren't there good humans and bad humans?" Having been set on track by this, Elder Whiscash said, "Correct. Taking pity on Gardevoir, Ninetales asked the human, 'Do you wish to save Gardevoir?' But by then, the human had already abandoned Gardevoir and fled. Ninetales became disillusioned with the human… And made this prediction: 'That human will one day be reborn as a Pokemon.'" This last part shocked Team Go-Getters, who glanced at each other nervously before turning back to Elder Whiscash. He then continued, "'And when the human becomes a Pokemon, the world's balance will be upset…'" Taking a breath, he said, "And that is how the legend goes. So, did you all find it interesting?" While Pikachu, Pichu, and Raichu immediately said they enjoyed it, everyone noticed Team Go-Getters didn't say anything at all. When Raichu asked what was wrong, Elder Whiscash said, "I know what it is. They found it so interesting that they are at a loss for words! Hohoho," he chuckled, causing Team Go-Getters to sweat drop. He then continued, "There's no need to wear those serious expressions, young ones. Certainly some rumors suggest that perhaps the legend is true… But it is only old folklore, nothing more." He then

yawned, then said, "Well, I believe I will take a short nap now. If you want to hear the tale again or any others, come by again later. Hohoho." He then began to nod off as the group stood up and left. While Pikachu, Pichu, and Raichu decided to stay in the grassy area and talk about it, Team Go-Getters headed back towards the village center. As they reached it, Charmander said, "Hey, guys, do you want to call it a day now? I just can't seem to get motivated…" Chikorita agreed with him, and Squirtle decided it was a good idea as well.

The team left the village and stopped in front of their Team Base. "Sorry about this, Squirtle. You probably have it in you to work, but we just can't seem to get motivated," Chikorita told him. Squirtle had a worried look, so Charmander said, "It must be because of that story. We'll head home and try to clear our heads out some, okay? See you tomorrow." They then walked around Squirtle, who turned to watch them go. After walking a few seconds, Charmander suddenly stopped, then turned to look at Squirtle a moment before shouting, "Squirtle! I'm sorry!" Squirtle eyes widened at this, wondering what he was sorry for. "I actually started doubting you for a second, Squirtle…" Charmander explained. "But not anymore. I believe in you, Squirtle," he said, walking back to Squirtle. "Because you're a friend like no other. A friend… That I could never find a replacement for…" he said, surprising Squirtle with a hug. He released Squirtle and, smiling, said, "Okay, Squirtle! Let's do our best tomorrow like always!" He then headed home, passing Chikorita who had stopped as well.

After Charmander had left, Chikorita was left alone with Squirtle. She walked up to him, slowly as if thinking about what to say, and stopped in front of him. "Well, I must admit that I feel guilty of doubting you too, Squirtle," she said. "But I was afraid of telling you because I wasn't sure what you would think. But I feel better, knowing that Charmander has the same faith in you that I do. I was just worried after hearing all of this talk about the world's balance, but I know that no one would ever think you'd do anything like that, considering all you've done since you joined our team. Even if you have some doubts, don't go away. It won't be much fun having a Rescue Team without you." She looked at him for a little bit, blushing slightly while Squirtle looked down, letting her and Charmander's words sink in. After a little bit, he looked back up and nodded, though his face still seemed to be lost in thought. She looked happy and said, "Thank you, Squirtle! Like Charmander said, let's do our best tomorrow like we always do! Bye!" She then headed home herself, while Squirtle stood there, letting everything they said fully sink in. It was quite a while before he moved and headed inside the Team Base to remove his scarf and the toolbox before going to sleep.

That night, as the moonlight poured in through the windows, Squirtle was tossing and turning as he was dreaming again.

**Squirtle's Dream**

_Squirtle opened his eyes and saw himself floating in a void full of swirling colors. _"_It's that dream again… The one I haven't had in a while…_"_ he whispered as the landscape began to take shape. The mountains began to form, followed by forests as well as buildings near

some of the trees. Soon, a ground formed under him, and he found himself standing in a town that had steps leading down into an area that looked to be cut in the ground. The whole town seemed to be giving off a sense of history, especially the area that was down the stairs. After looking around, he ran to check that area out first, seeing a cave in the other side. On the sides of the caves were two carvings that showed two Pokemon, a blue one on one side and a pink one on the other. They seemed familiar, but he wasn't sure why. He decided to investigate the cave._

Passing inside, he walked a short distance before reaching the end, seeing another carving on the wall. This one showed three Pokemon arranged in a triangle shape around something. There was some writing on it as well, but he couldn't understand it. He continued to look at the carving, wondering if it was related to the two outside, until he felt the familiar presence of someone appearing in his dream. He turned around to see the same familiar silhouette from his previous dreams.

"_I always see the same silhouette when I have this dream,_" _Squirtle whispered to himself. Suddenly, he could he hear the figure speaking, though it wasn't quite clear what it was saying. Squirtle decided to try talking to it, so he said, _"_Hello. Please, tell me. You… Who are you?_"_ A moment of silence, then the figure said, _"_…I am… Gardevoir._" _This surprised Squirtle, knowing that the figure in his dreams was Gardevoir. She wore a happy look as she said, _"_I'm so glad. Finally… I finally got to meet you…_" _From the way she was talking, it sounded like she knew Squirtle from somewhere. _"_Finally? Did you know me from before? Something about me?_"_ he asked. She looked at him and said, _"_I am your…_"_ The rest of her sentence faded, as did she, along with the dreamscape. _"_Oh! Wait, don't go yet. Please, tell me more._" _However, there was no time for more, as everything faded away._

**End of dream**

Squirtle's eyes opened slightly, soon opening all the way as he sat up. He looked around the cave a moment before thinking about last night. "That's such a mysterious dream," he said to himself, his hand on his chin. "I have it as well as those other dreams, but this time, the dream was clearer than before. That Pokemon in my dream… I think I learned who it was..." Suddenly, it came to him. "Gardevoir! Gardevoir is the one who appears in my dreams! And yesterday, Whiscash said that the human in the legend had a Gardevoir who she considered a partner!" Squirtle's face suddenly paled in horror at this realization. "Was it me…? Was I Gardevoir's partner? Did I abandon her when she was in trouble? Is that why I became a Pokemon…?" He looked at his blue hands as he spoke, then suddenly, he dashed out of the Team Base, leaving behind the toolbox and his scarf.

Sort of a cliff-hanger ending, isn't it? Hope you enjoyed it!

Some music that I thought of when I wrote this:

Whiscash's Tale- The Nine Tailed Legend (PMD: Red/Blue Rescue Team)

Strong Bonds of Friendship- A Fleeting Dream (Final Fantasy X)

Realization- Open Ocean (Ecco the Dolphin (Sega CD version))

Next chapter will be up a little later. Peace out!

11. Fugitives

Charmander and Chikorita walked up the path that was to the left of the Team Base, as they were coming to get Squirtle before starting work. They were later than normal because they stopped after meeting up with each other to talk about Squirtle, specifically why they trusted him so much and why they wanted him to stay with them forever. They ended up talking for a while, the sun being higher than it normally was when they arrived at their Team Base. They were a bit surprised to see that Squirtle wasn't standing in front of the base like he normally does. They weren't too surprised, though, since they knew Squirtle could occasionally sleep in a bit, but even that was unusual for him.

"It's not like Squirtle to sleep in on a work day," Chikorita commented, to which Charmander nodded. He then said, "Well, maybe he had trouble falling asleep last night. I mean, the night before yesterday, I had trouble falling asleep myself." Chikorita said, "I did too, but that was because I was worried about what Xatu had told us. It's not like Squirtle to be worried." They decided to go wake him up, so they crossed the bridge and went inside, only to become very worried as they realized Squirtle was not in the base. What's more, the toolbox was still in the place Squirtle always left it, his scarf neatly folded on top of the inside. This made them worry that Squirtle might've been abducted.

"Charmander, come on! We need to get out there and find him!" Chikorita exclaimed, afraid of what happened to their blue pokepal and planning to make whoever did it pay. However, Charmander grabbed her and forced to look at him, saying, "Chikorita, calm down! Getting all worked up is not going to help us find him any faster! We just need to stay calm and think this through." She showed a look of worry as she said, "But… What if… Someone took him and is hurting him?" Charmander looked worried at this, but said, "Look, we just found out that he's gone. We have no idea where he could be at this point, or even if he was taken by someone. If we just started searching one place to the next without anything to go on, it would take much longer, and who knows what could happen in that time." She saw that Charmander was really trying to stay calm for Squirtle's sake, so she steadied herself and said, "Okay… You're right. What should we do first?" Charmander thought for a moment, then said, "Let's go to Pokemon Square. If he was there at all, someone would've surely seen him. We'll ask around and see if anyone saw him or anything suspicious." She nodded, and they headed out the door, deciding to leave the toolbox behind unless they had to go into dangerous territory.

After crossing the bridge into the village, they questioned everyone they could find. The Kecleon Brothers, Aunty Kangaskhan, Gulpin, Wigglytuff, Persian, even Team ACT and the rest of the villagers. None of them had

seen Squirtle or anything that looked out of the ordinary, but Pikachu, Pichu, Raichu, and Team ACT said they would help them look for Squirtle. With no clues to go on, Charmander, Chikorita, and everyone else decided to search the Friend Areas and other surrounding areas to see if Squirtle had been sighted.

Meanwhile, up to the northwest of the village, Squirtle had just gotten to the small pond in the woods and was trying to calm himself down by working off the energy he had gotten from his panic by taking a swim. After a few minutes of this, he climbed out, somewhat more composed and calmer. As he looked at the water, he recalled everything he had heard the past two days. What Xatu said about him having an aura within, the fear of seeing the world's ruin, Whiscash speaking of the Legend of Ninetales, and finally finding out that the Pokemon in his dreams was Gardevoir. He looked at his reflection, wondering if it was really him that was the cause of the natural disasters in this world. He then thought about what Xatu mentioned about his aura, as the way Xatu spoke of it seemed to indicate that he must've known how to wield his aura before he woke up as a Squirtle. He thought back to the battle against Zapdos, as he recalled that he was surrounded by a kind of energy shortly before they defeated Zapdos. He remembered that they were in peril at the time and that somehow caused him to temporarily have the abilities that helped them win the battle.

"_Could that have been what Xatu was talking about? If it was, is it possible that I can use it like that normally, or does it only come out when I'm in danger? It feels like I should know this, but I can't recall anything related to using aura,_" Squirtle thought to himself, trying to work some of the things out of his brain. Still, he couldn't work out what he had heard from Elder Whiscash, especially after learning that Gardevoir had been appearing in some of his dreams. He stood there, gazing at his reflection, wondering what he should do now that he knew this.

At this time, Charmander was starting to search the forest, hoping that Squirtle may have come out here. So far, the search had turned up negative, as no one in the Friend Areas had seen a Squirtle and there was no trace of him in the grassy plains. This was one of the last places they could search without needing to take supplies with, so he hoped Squirtle was either in the surrounding forest or the Tiny Woods. As he walked through the woods, he kept calling out for Squirtle, hoping that if Squirtle could hear him, he would answer back. Soon, he began to approach the pond where he had first met Squirtle, and saw someone standing by the pond. Encouraged by this sight, he ran towards the pond, and soon recognized the figure as Squirtle. "Found you!" he called, as he came closer, and Squirtle turned around at his voice, only to get tackled by his friend.

After being knocked onto his shell, Squirtle managed to pull himself into a sitting position while Charmander stood there looking at him. "What happened? Why did you come out here without saying anything?" he asked. Squirtle looked down, not sure what to say, which caused Charmander to notice that he looked a little pale. "What's wrong? Come on, Squirtle, you know you can tell me," he said. Squirtle looked back up and said, "I…

Had a dream last night." Charmander listened carefully, wondering what Squirtle had dreamt about. "It was the one that I told you and Chikorita about. The one with the colors and the silhouette. I learned who it was this time. It was… Gardevoir," he told Charmander. Charmander looked surprised at this, but then asked, "But what does that have to do with running off?" Squirtle sighed, then said, "After hearing that story from Whiscash yesterday, I thought that meant I might be the human in the legend. It made me worried, so I wanted to get away until I could at least clear my head." Charmander looked at him for a moment, then said, "Listen, Squirtle. While you were dreaming, did you remember what you were like when you were a human?" Squirtle shook his head, so Charmander said, "If that's the case, then you don't know that that's what happened." He softened his expression and said, "I… You know Chikorita and I believe in you, Squirtle. You know that, don't you? What happened to the Squirtle we know, the one who wouldn't let something like this get to him?"

Squirtle sighed, then gave a small smile as he said, "You're right. I don't know what happened. I guess I just worried too much about everything we've heard and it all got to me. I wouldn't be able to forgive myself if I ever did something like that. I'm sorry." Charmander smiled and patted him on the shoulder, saying, "Hey, don't worry about it. I don't know if I would've been strong enough to want to get away to calm down after hearing that. I probably would've been more scared." He then helped Squirtle to his feet and asked, "Do you feel better now?" Squirtle nodded and said, "Yeah, my head feels much lighter now. Thank you." Charmander nodded, and the two began to make their way back to the village, wondering if Chikorita had gone back yet.

A little while later, they made it back to the front of their Team Base, and noticed that Chikorita seemed to be pacing out in front. As soon as she spotted them, she ran over to them. "You found him! Squirtle, are you okay?" she asked, trying to keep under control while still being very worried. "Yeah, he's alright. He had a bad dream, but he feels better about it now," Charmander explained. Chikorita wondered what kind of dream he had, so Charmander told her and she understood why Squirtle panicked like he did. They both were just glad that Squirtle returned unharmed and was okay now. Then Chikorita remembered something and said, "Oh yeah, I was waiting for you both to get back. There are Pokemon gathering in the square for some reason. Maybe we should go check it out." Charmander and Squirtle agreed and they headed for Pokemon Square.

As Team Go-Getters stood on the bridge into town, they all sensed that something seemed different about the town atmosphere. They wondered if something happened and went into town to see. As they approached the village center, they saw that Chikorita was right: there were Pokemon gathered for some reason.

"Hey, what's going on here?" Charmander called out. Bellsprout heard him and turned, walked over, and said, "Team Go-Getters! Let me tell you, I was shocked! Turns out it really was true!" Chikorita stepped up and asked, "What turned out to be true?" Bellsprout turned to her and said, "The Legend of Ninetales! I was sure amazed that it was true, since, as I

told you, I never believed the rumors!" This made Squirtle a bit nervous, wondering what the new information revealed.

Another Pokemon came from the crowd, and they recognized it as Pichu. "Squirtle, Charmander, Chikorita!" he called out as he approached. "Oh, Pichu! Even you came out?" Charmander asked. He looked down and said, "Yes." Suddenly, Snubbull turned around and said, "Ssh! Keep it down. He's telling us about it." Squirtle looked and asked, "Who is?" Pichu looked up and said, "Well… Maybe you should just come and see." They all walked towards the center, and Team Go-Getters was surprised to see it was none other than Gengar! Squirtle noted that he seemed to look a bit nervous, possibly because he was standing up in front of so many Pokemon.

"So there I was, up at the Hill of the Ancients. And that's where it was. It was shocking stuff, I tell you what!" Gengar said. "Shocking stuff?" Lombre asked. "I saw a Pokemon there, talking to Xatu, but… Well, according to Xatu, anyway… It was actually a human!" he exclaimed, slightly stumbling over his words. But these words shocked everyone; even the members of Team ACT, who were hanging out on the path to Whiscash's pond, looked a bit surprised to hear this.

"There's more," Gengar started again. "Xatu mentioned that how the human became a Pokemon is somehow connected to how the world's balance has become upset, I believe." Lombre then said, "Wait… That's like in the Legend of Ninetales!" Gengar then said, "Um… There's more. Xatu said that the disasters are occurring because the world's balance has been upset. And if it's not fixed soon, he said that the unthinkable will befall the world!" This caused everyone to panic, except Team ACT, who were keeping their calm composure.

Gengar then said, "Yes… The world will be ruined because of that…" He then cast his eyes over so he was looking at Squirtle, then said, "Isn't that what he told you… Squirtle?" This was enough to even throw Team ACT's calm composure off. The square suddenly burst into shouts of surprise and disbelief, Pikachu, Pichu, and Raichu refusing to accept it and saying that Squirtle wouldn't do what the legend said happened. Alakazam then stepped in and said, "Calm down, everyone. Hear him out before making any accusations." Squirtle was trying to fight back how he was feeling as he said, "I can't! I don't remember anything! Not even my human name!" He was on the verge of tears as he said this. Gengar was shaking and sweating, as if he didn't want to believe it either, then tried to still himself as he said, "Y-You know, if he is the one that's causing the world to go out of balance, then why not get rid of him? If he really is the cause of the disasters, then getting rid of him should set things right, shouldn't it?" Gengar asked. This seemed to be an acceptable answer to the problem, as the villagers suddenly began to advance towards Squirtle. Charmander didn't like the look of them approaching, so he shouted, "RUN!!!" This was enough for Squirtle and Chikorita, as they stopped backing up and they all broke out into a run as they headed for the bridge. As he watched them run, Gengar wore a look of shame and thought, "_What have I done…?_"

Team Go-Getters ran all the way out of town, stopping once they reached their Team Base. "Phew… We got away in one piece…" Charmander sighed.

Chikorita looked back at town and said, "I didn't expect everyone to just attack us like that. They'll probably come after us sooner or later." Squirtle remained quiet, not sure what to say in this situation. "Hey, Squirtle, are you okay?" Charmander asked, worried. Squirtle looked at him and said, "I don't know. How am I supposed to feel in this situation? I don't even know what to do now." Chikorita then said, "Squirtle… We don't believe you could've done that sort of thing. So…" Her sentence was cut off, as Squirtle noticed someone coming closer. Charmander and Chikorita looked, and it became clear to the trio that it was Alakazam.

"Alakazam!" they exclaimed, not sure what he was doing here. "There's a town meeting going on right now," he explained. "The villagers are planning to come after you, Squirtle, in order to be rid of you." Squirtle asked him, "But why are you here telling us this?" Charmander then added, "And where are Charizard and Tyranitar?" Alakazam answered, "They are working to convince the villagers to hold off as long as they can on coming after you." This confused Team Go-Getters until Alakazam said, "Something tells me that what we heard from Gengar is not the truth. Even he didn't sound very sure of what he was saying. I came here to ask you to leave from here for now and get away from the Rescue Teams and other Pokemon that will chase you. We will have to join as well, but we will try to give you some time before we actually come after you. Charizard and Tyranitar both feel the same way. I'm here to ask you to leave and survive as fugitives until you can uncover the real truth." There was a moment of silence until Charmander said, "Okay, we will." Alakazam nodded and said, "The chase will likely begin early tomorrow. Please be gone by then." They agreed to this, and Alakazam added, "Thank you. And be brave. I must go now." And with that, he headed back to the village.

After Alakazam left, Chikorita turned to Squirtle and said, "You see, Squirtle? Even Team ACT has faith in you, too. And you know that we do as well. Even if we get attack by other Pokemon, we'll stand by you." Squirtle still looked unsure, and Charmander and Chikorita could tell he still didn't feel confident about this yet. Suddenly, they saw two more Pokemon coming towards them, and recognized them as Pikachu and Pichu. "Pichu wanted to say something. It applies to the both of us, but he says it better," Pikachu explained. Pichu shuffled his feet a moment, then said, "Remember what I said after you rescue big brother and Raichu, Squirtle? I said I wanted to be a part of a Rescue Team, preferably Team Go-Getters, when I was old enough. And that a real Rescue Base would be made here. Squirtle… Don't give up. You're a hero to me, Squirtle. I believe in you too." Charmander looked back at Squirtle and asked, "So, what do you think, Squirtle?" Squirtle seemed to be thinking, then his head came up and he said, "Who said I was worried? I wasn't going to give up anyway!" Everyone cheered at this and Pikachu said, "There's the Squirtle we all know!" They then settled down, deciding to use the rest of the day to get ready for their journey, knowing that they wouldn't be back until they found the truth.

The next day, before the sun appeared on the horizon…

In the dark of the early morning, Squirtle exited the Team Base, still a bit sleepy but with his Pecha Scarf and the toolbox on. He breathed into

his hands, since the air was a bit cool, while he waited for Charmander and Chikorita to show up. Shortly after he came outside, he saw the telltale flame approaching and walked out across the bridge to greet them. He noticed they had their own bags, likely filled with the extra supplies they had collected yesterday.

"Morning, Squirtle! It's early, but of course you'd be up now!" Charmander said, and it was clear that he was still a bit sleepy as well. Chikorita looked the same, but she was good at hiding it. "Well, like Alakazam said, we're fugitives now. It's going to be a dangerous trip, but right now, we have to get away," Chikorita said. Squirtle remembered what he thought after helping Pikachu rescue Pichu some time ago. He told himself that he would keep helping his friends, no matter how long it took him to find out the answers about how he became a Pokemon. Now, they were all focusing their efforts on getting this information so everyone could trust him again. He then looked up as Charmander said, "Okay, we'd better get going!" As they began to walk, they soon stopped as they heard a voice calling out to them. With the little light they had around them and Charmander's tail, they could see it was Pichu, Pikachu, Raichu, and both of the Jumpluff. They ran over to the Rescue Team, Pikachu saying, "Whew, I'm glad! We just made it in time." The Jumpluff who had been their client said, "We came to see you off, Team Go-Getters." Suddenly, they all heard a soft, female voice call out, "I heard about this and wanted to as well." They all looked up and saw a Skarmory coming in for a landing, the same Skarmory from their first mission. "Word reached out to my nest, and I remembered that you helped wake me up from that weird anger that I had. So I woke up to come out and send you off as well." Team Go-Getters all felt a bit overwhelmed that so many woke up so early just to see them leave on their journey. Suddenly, everyone heard the sound of wings flapping, and looked up to see the Pelipper postal worker who usually delivered their mail. He landed, dropped a letter in the mailbox, then headed off on his usual routine. Squirtle took the letter out and began to read it. "Take care, amigos! It's farewell, but only for now. Until the day comes when I can deliver mail to you again… I will be waiting for that day. Always. -The wandering postal carrier, Pelipper-" Team Go-Getters was all the more choked up at the kindness that everyone displayed that morning.

Skarmory cast her gaze to the east and turned back, saying, "The sun will rise soon. The village Pokemon will start waking up once it does. Hurry! You have to go!" Team Go-Getters agreed and promised that they would return, telling the Pokemon to take care while they said the same thing to the trio. They all waved to each other until the members of Team Go-Getters disappeared from sight.

Thus, the journey for Squirtle, Charmander, and Chikorita as fugitives began as they left the village outskirts, determined to get away and find the truth. Only time will tell if they can find the truth before it's too late for them or the world. But they will always watch out for each other along the way, just the same way that someone is watching over them.

And so it begins. Can Team Go-Getters learn the truth in time, or will Squirtle be defeated before that can happen?

Some music I thought of for this chapter:

Searching for Squirtle- Internet (Megaman Battle Network 5)

The Truth Comes Out- Sword of Doubt (Final Fantasy IX)

Believers- Memories (PMD: EoT/EoD/EoS)

Morning of Farewells- Fugitive (PMD: Red/Blue Rescue Team)

The Journey Begins- Someone's Watching Over Me (Hilary Duff)

12. Escaping the Mob

Team Go-Getters has been on the run for almost a week now. After leaving Pokemon Square, they headed east in the direction of the Mirage Woods. While the surrounding forest had been shorter and easier to navigate when they went to Mt. Thunder, the path they were taking to the east was long and winding, so it took about a day to reach the mountains at the far end of the forest. They were able to find a secluded cave where they could camp for the night with little danger of being caught by their pursuers. The next day, they began to climb up the mountain they were near and continue to the east. As they crossed the mountains, they came across fissures that went deep into the ground beneath them, which they found amazing. Fortunately, their training helped put some ground between them and their pursuers, as the large mob had difficulty moving quickly after them on the mountain trails, even with the Rescue Teams that were part of it. It took about a day and a half to reach the other side of the mountain range, but they had put some distance between them and the mob.

After reaching the base on the other side and finding a safe spot to camp when night came, they continued east, though they were starting to angle to the north as well. As they passed through another forest, they came across a forest fire, which looked like it had been burning for quite a while. Due to the size of some of the flames, they broke from the path they were following, having Squirtle use Water Gun to clear a path leading north, where there lay a long stretch of rock and sand. The terrain was rough to cross, but the weather was not overly hot, so it wasn't too bad of a forced detour. Upon reaching it, they started heading to the east again, aiming for a cave that was on their map. The journey across the dry plains took about two days, but it put them close to the cave they had been heading for. Throughout it all, the members of Team Go-Getters helped keep each others heads held high, which helped them endeavor to overcome the hardships they faced.

After a few more hours of travel, they came to their destination, known as Lapis Cave. "Whew. We've sure come a long way out here," Charmander commented, as they stood at the cave entrance. Chikorita and Squirtle agreed with him, remembering the Pokemon they had run into while they were moving and getting around the dangers in the mountains and plains.

Thankfully, their extra supplies helped greatly, and they were able to locate some more as they had been on the move.

"Yeah, and we sure saw a few areas that have been affected by the natural disasters. It's pretty awful," Squirtle added. Chikorita nodded and said, "I bet that many Pokemon are suffering due to all the calamities. It's too bad we're being pursued so relentlessly that we can't stop and try to help." They agreed with her, but they knew that they had to keep moving and get away, and complaining would only increase the chances that they would be caught.

As they prepared to enter the cave, Squirtle suddenly froze at something. "What's the matter, Squirtle?" Charmander asked. Squirtle looked back at the path they walked and said, "I think I just heard someone talking." Chikorita and Charmander looked in that direction and listened, hoping this didn't mean what they thought it meant. Listening carefully, it turns out that they had thought right. The mob of Pokemon was closing in on them!

"I think that they're headed this way," an unfamiliar voice said. "Are you sure?" another voice asked. "No doubt. Their scent is strong in that direction," the first voice spoke to the owner of the second. "Good. They can't escape. Not from all of us," a third voice said, upon hearing the first two. "We have to catch up to Team Go-Getters and get rid of that Squirtle quickly," a fourth voice concluded.

"Aw, no! They're catching up, alright!" Chikorita exclaimed. "Come on, we'd better hurry!" Charmander said, and he headed for the cave entrance. Chikorita and Squirtle followed behind him, but they all stopped when they heard the voices talking about something new. "I will admit, Nicky probably is our only chance. Call him, Little John!" the third voice said. "Why should I call him Little John? That's my name!" a new, younger voice said. Team Go-Getters giggled at this, then headed inside after they heard the fourth voice say, "Never mind. We'll just do it together." They didn't know what they wanted this Nicky character for, but they decided that it wasn't their business to know, especially not now.

As soon as they entered it, Team Go-Getters was awed at the appearance of the Lapis Cave. The rocks and the cave walls seemed to be made of crystal, so they figured that lapis must've stood for a type of crystal in order to be named so. The beauty of the cave was further enhanced by the indentations in the ground that were filled with water. The sparkling water combined with the sparkling cave walls… Squirtle couldn't help but blush at the beauty the two created. They quickly got back to themselves after a minute and started moving into the cave, hoping that there was an exit somewhere and the cave wasn't a dead end.

Once they got away from the entrance, the cave became very dark, so they had to stick close to Charmander and stay alert for any nearby Pokemon. For a while, all they saw were Zubat that were sleeping in the cave's darkness, as well as some Nincada that were enjoying the darkness as well. There were quite a few water pools, so at one point, they stopped to have a drink and refill their water canteens. Still, they knew they

couldn't relax too much, since the Pokemon chasing them was probably in the cave at this point.

As Team Go-Getters worked their way through the winding passageways of the Lapis Cave, they began to see stronger Pokemon hanging out in the areas where the sunlight seeped in through the cracks in the ceiling. They would occasionally see Nidorino and/or Nidorina, sometimes seeing them snuggled up together. Most of these couples didn't take too kindly to the rescuers who weren't looking for trouble, so the often had to run so they wouldn't end up on the receiving end of a horn. At times, they would also hear a slight buzzing in the air, which usually ended up being an Illumise that was going for water or food. These were friendlier than the Nidorino and Nidorina, though it was better to stay away from the ones that weren't in a good mood. They seemed to be putting a bit of distance away from their pursuers since they could only occasionally hear the sounds of chatter coming from behind.

It had now been a while since Team Go-Getters had entered the cave, and it was clear that the cave was leading them down, due to the air being cooler than it was near the entrance, so it was lucky they had Charmander's flame to provide them with a little heat. They were starting to see more Pokemon as they went, some of them they had already encountered, though these were noticeably tougher than the earlier ones, as well as some fresh faces they had not encountered before. They began to see Tangela, who would either try to hit them away with power or try to use their multitude of vines to wrap them up. They also encountered Bagon, who made good use of their heads by running at full speed and ramming them, usually into the walls, though one knocked Squirtle into a nearby water pool before falling in itself. The sound of voices indicated that danger was coming close and they needed to hurry.

Soon, the cave began to seem a little brighter, which encouraged the Rescue Team, as it might be a way out. They began to head towards the source of it, but kept getting slowed down by tons of Golbat, who were getting irritated by the sight of the sun. It was tricky knocking down a wildly flapping Golbat, since they often blasted their Supersonic in their direction, causing the young team's heads to spin. And as if that wasn't bad enough, their flight patterns made them hard to hit from the ground. Still, Team Go-Getters prevailed over these complications and slowly but steadily made their way closer to the source of the light.

Finally, after a little more walking up and down the passages of the cave and dealing with more Pokemon that saw the team as invading on their turf, Squirtle, Charmander, and Chikorita finally came to the source of the light. Like they had hoped, it was an exit, so they quickly ran out into the open sunlight, glad to feel the warmth again after walking in the cool caves for so long.

"Ah! That was quite a walk we had, but we made it through the cave," Squirtle sighed, stretching out a little as his body warmed up. Charmander and Chikorita nodded, doing likewise as they could take at least a moment to relax after that crystal crossing. Charmander looked around a little bit and asked, "Huh, where's the mob that was chasing after us?" Chikorita and Squirtle looked around too as they stood on the

stones near the exit, but they couldn't see or hear any trace of the mob either.

Suddenly, a voice called out from the cave, saying, "Hey, look! There they are! They're out there!" This caught their attention, as they could begin to see the shape of Pokemon as they approached the exit. "Oh no! Here they come!" cried Chikorita, seeing how close they were now. "Oh man, let's get out of here!" Squirtle said. With that they took off running as the pursuers came out of the cave. "Catch them!" they shouted chasing after Team Go-Getters.

Team Go-Getters ran north, with their pursuers not slowing down as they followed. "Stop right there!" someone shouted. "_They think we're just going to stop because they said to and wait for them?_" Squirtle thought to himself. "Don't let them get away!" someone else shouted. The chase continued on for a short while, until Team Go-Getters headed into some rocky terrain near some mountains, using their small size to their advantage to make it through the trickier spots. Due to that, they began to lose the crowd slightly, stopping to catch their breath when they had lost sight of them for a few minutes.

"Huff… Huff…" they gasped as they tried to catch their breath after that near death chase scene. Suddenly, Chikorita looked up the path ahead and shouted, "Oh no! Squirtle, Charmander, look!" They looked ahead and saw a large mountain in their path, evidently a volcano as it was spewing lava and smoke. "There's a lot of lava pouring out of that crater… I wonder if there's any chance of getting through a place like that," Charmander said, as there seemed to be only a few places where the lava wasn't flowing down the side. Squirtle looked behind them and said, "It's probably safer than staying here. At least some of the Pokemon may stop chasing us." Charmander and Chikorita turned to him, wondering if it would be better to risk it, when Squirtle suddenly spotted one of the Pokemon from the mob, a Rhydon. Once it caught sight of them, it shouted, "Look! They're over here!" This caught the attention of the mob, which started heading that way with someone shouting, "Get them!" With nowhere else to go, they decided to take a chance and began running for the mountain. The Pokemon in the mob saw where they were going, and someone said, "Look at them go! They're headed for Mt. Blaze!" At this, someone else said, "Are they mad? Mt. Blaze is doomed desolation! No one's ever come this far and lived to tell it!" With some members of the mob showing reluctance, one of the mob leaders said, "There's no choice. Only those who are brave enough will give chase!" Leaving some of the Pokemon behind, the rest of the mob chased after the Rescue Team.

While following the rocky trail, Team Go-Getters came close to a slope leading up Mt. Blaze that wasn't too steep, so they started running up it. After getting partway up the path, they stopped, knowing they couldn't keep going with the mob chasing after them. That kind of pressure would hurt their concentration and make them rush their decisions. And with a place like Mt. Blaze, rushing would only make it easier to end up a crispy critter.

They began to look around, hoping to find some way to throw the mob off their trail, if only for a little while. As they searched, they noticed a

crack in the side of the mountain, which had a small hole in the bottom of it. It was just big enough they could all fit in, while still being small enough to be easily skipped over by anyone in a hurry. They all squeezed their way in, one at a time, finding themselves in a small rocky room, with enough space for them all to move around. They figured that a Pokemon had used Dig in order to make a spot on Mt. Blaze that was off the path and out of the way of anything that might come up or down the mountain. They tensed as they heard the sound of heavy footsteps, and held their breath as they got closer, hoping that the mob would not notice their little hidey hole…

Will this be the end? Find out next time!

I was inspired by these music pieces:

Fleeing Across the Land- Roaring Forces: The Chase (Ecco the Dolpin: Defender of the Future)

The Cave Escape- Lapis Cave (PMD: Red/Blue Rescue Team), Tube of Medusa (Ecco: The Tides of Time (Genesis Version))

The Chase Continues- Run! (Final Fantasy IX)

13. Beating the Heat

The sound of heavy footsteps could be heard all over the slopes of Mt. Blaze as the mob of Pokemon and Rescue Teams continued to search the paths to locate Team Go-Getters, who seemingly disappeared shortly after starting their climb. The fact that there was no trace of the team anywhere was really frustrating to the mob.

"Darn it! Where'd those fugitives go?" a deep voice asked as a group of Pokemon stopped right in front of the crack where Squirtle, Charmander, and Chikorita were hiding. "They had to have gone up the mountain! Where else could they go without being seen or getting hurt?" another voice said. "But we searched as far as the cave entrance that's near the top of the mountain! Even if they had been able to get through the Rock Path up ahead quickly, they couldn't have gotten to the peak and off the mountain before we found them! I still say they're trying to give us the slip!" a lower voice, possibly from a young Pokemon, said. "And how could they have done that, wise guy? We've seen enough of this mountain to know that if there were a suitable hiding place in the rock, it would require getting across a pool of lava. And we've left no stone unturned on the trail and in the Rock Path. There's no place on this mountain to hide!" the second voice yelled. "But… They had to have done something… This is the last place I can pick up their scent, so they couldn't have kept climbing," the third voice said, and by the sound of his voice, he was shaking. "WHAT CAN YOU SMELL ON THIS MOUNTAIN?! BRIMSTONE!! THAT'S ALL ANYONE CAN SMELL!! SO USE YOUR EYES, DINGUS!!" the second voice yelled out, loudly and angrily enough that Team Go-Getters, who were still

hiding in the mountain crack, could swear that the small opening actually got a little bigger.

Squirtle, Chikorita, and Charmander had moved as far away from the hole as possible, as they were so nervous about being this close that they were afraid the Pokemon would be able to hear their pounding hearts. And if they were found where they were, there were so many ways that the Pokemon in front of them could get rid of all of them. However, the tension was getting to them and they knew that it was only a matter of time before one of them couldn't take the pressure anymore and crack.

"What are we gonna do, guys? This is a great hiding spot, but we can't stay in this small space forever while this group and however many others there are search the mountain until they find us or give up," Charmander whispered, his voice really low so the group outside couldn't hear them. Since they were all huddled together, they had no problem having him whisper that softly. "That's a good question. There's not much we can do from here that could get them to go away without telling them where we are," Chikorita whispered back. Squirtle thought about what Chikorita said, and a thought suddenly came to him. "Maybe a little ventriloquism could get us out of this," he whispered to them, seeing there was a way to throw the Pokemon off. "Ventriloquism?" Charmander asked. "Sure. If I can throw my voice to make it sound like it's coming from somewhere on the mountain, they might leave," he explained. "Do you think they'll fall for it?" Chikorita asked. "It might give us some time to try to get away from here at least," Squirtle whispered back. "It's worth a shot. Can you do it?" Charmander asked, and Squirtle nodded.

Taking slow, careful steps, Squirtle crawled over to the opening so as not to make any sounds. Once he got right up to the hole, he pressed his shell against the wall next to the opening and took a quick breath. Then he called out, "HELP! Someone get me out from between these rocks!" The way he said it, it sounded like he was calling out from below where the Pokemon were. The whole mob instantly heard it and believed Squirtle to be there.

"That was him! The priority one Pokemon!" one of the Pokemon in the group said. "Okay then, let's go down there and give him the hand he needs! Keep your eyes open, everyone!" a Pokemon who descended after hearing the call said. With the whole mob back together, they headed for the base of the mountain with a resounding, "ROOOOOOAAAAR!" The sound of heavy footsteps was once again heard for the next minute or so, as every Pokemon that had been chasing Team Go-Getters was headed for where they thought Squirtle was.

Silence ruled the mountain for several minutes, as the Pokemon retraced their steps. Soon, Charmander poked his head out from the hiding spot to look around. Encouraged by the emptiness, he pulled himself out and looked around the slope, seeing no Pokemon wherever he looked. After listening carefully and hearing nothing besides flowing lava, Charmander went back to the hole and said, "I think they're gone. It should be okay to come out now." With that, Squirtle and Chikorita crawled out, staying quiet just in case there was still someone listening. The trio climbed up a short ways, cautious as heck, looking around at every step until they

reached an alcove in the mountain, where there was a Kangaskhan Rock. There was also a cave entrance in the side of the mountain, as well as a trench a little further ahead which had lava flowing down it. Once they reached this area, they finally relaxed a bit.

"Whew. Your plan worked perfectly, Squirtle. We're finally not being pursued by a large mob," Chikorita said. Squirtle sighed in relief and ran his hand through his hair, wiping the sweat off. Over the course of the last few days, his hair had begun to get longer, now having a small tuft just above his forehead, while the hair on the rest of his head was starting to get longer as well. "We may have lost them, but there isn't any point hiding on this mountain," Charmander said. "We'll have to get to the other side of the mountain to truly get away from the Pokemon chasing us. We can rest a few minutes and use the Kangaskhan Rock here to get any supplies out of storage, then we need to get on the move again." Both Squirtle and Chikorita agreed to this, so they stocked up and rested for a few minutes in the alcove while still keeping an eye and an ear open. Once they were fully rested, they went into the cave, realizing that the mob must've used it to climb further up the mountain. They figured that it must be the entrance to the Rock Path that the Pokemon had been discussing.

The Rock Path appeared to be a cave that cut straight through part of Mt. Blaze, due to the fact that as they walked, they noticed falls of lava coming down through the ceiling, emptying into pools that would flow out the side of the mountain. Because of this, Team Go-Getters had to be careful when they had to walk on a narrow path above one of these pools. As they went through the cave, they saw many Fire-type Pokemon, such as Rapidash and Torkoal, in addition to others that could handle living in the hot caves, such as Shuckle and, somehow, Pidgeotto. Fortunately, none of them tried to attack when they were getting close to the lava, opting instead to attack in the open rooms where there was no lava coming through the rock.

It was a rough climb for Team Go-Getters, as they had to deal with the Pokemon on the mountain as well as the sweltering heat. Chikorita could stand it somewhat, but Squirtle was really having a rough go since the heat seemed to dry him up to the point where he couldn't use Water Gun. Since Charmander wasn't affected by the heat, he did his best to make sure they avoided running into too many dangers so they could conserve their energy for climbing the mountain.

After spending some time working their way through the Rock Path, Squirtle, Charmander, and Chikorita found the exit, which put them close to the summit. They were thankful to whoever it was that formed the Rock Path, as it allowed them to avoid trying to find a way to cross the trenches and lava. As they headed up, they came across the entrance to another cave, which opened into a small room that had lava flowing on the right and left sides and a Kangaskhan Rock in the middle. They decided to take a break from their mountain climbing adventure and have a quick break. Squirtle and Chikorita made sure to drink enough water to make sure they were hydrated, while still leaving enough water for the future. They also had a quick snack, and when that was done, they packed up their bags and headed the rest of the way into this new cave.

This cave was much like the Rock Path, except the lava wasn't coming in here, so there weren't any lava pools. There was the same familiar brown rocky ground, with the walls being gray and having what looked like glowing rocks coming down them like lava. They couldn't tell if it actually was lava, since it was hot when they got close, but it wasn't flowing out of the wall. Thankfully, it didn't seem to be as hot in this cave, so they made better time getting through. They encountered a few Arcanine, as well as a few Fearow flocking around inside, but they didn't run into anything else. Soon, they found the end of the cave and walked outside.

As they looked around, they could see some large rocks and the sky off to their left, while on their right was a large lava lake. "Did we make it? Are we at Mt. Blaze's summit?" Squirtle asked, knowing the answer but still wanting to ask the question anyway. Charmander and Chikorita looked around, then said that they were. Charmander then looked into the crater at the lava and said, "Wow. This is amazing. I know it's a volcano, but the lava flow is much higher than it should be. Maybe it's because of the calamities…" Squirtle and Chikorita couldn't help but agree with the thought.

Suddenly, streams of lava leapt straight into the sky from the crater. "Aah! It's like a… A furnace here! It feels like I'm burning up!" Chikorita exclaimed, as the blasts seemed to make the summit feel even hotter. Charmander turned to Squirtle and Chikorita and said, "This place is too dangerous to hang around. Let's get through here quickly." Squirtle looked around and spotted a path that looked like it would lead down to the opposite side they had been on.

As they passed the front of the crater, the trio suddenly heard someone shout, "Halt!" Immediately after the voice had spoken, the area turned dark. It then continued, "I can hear the mountain's screams… It shrieks in pain… Someone is causing Mt. Blaze to writhe in agony! Is it you?!" At this, Team Go-Getters got nervous, and Chikorita said, "No! I swear, we're not causing it! We're just trying to get through here!" Charmander then asked, "Who are you? How do you know this?" They heard a loud "Gyaaaaaaaaaaah!" and the streams of lava emerged once again. "The mountain's rage is my rage!" the voice shouted as the streams continued to appear. Suddenly, Squirtle felt something coming from behind them and pushed Charmander and Chikorita out of the way, just barely missing the attacker. They looked up to see a bird that seemed to be made entirely of flames, except for its beak and talons. "I am Moltres! The warrior of fire am I! Those who befoul the mountain will receive no forgiveness! En garde!"

Moltres began the battle by flying for Team Go-Getters with a Peck attack. They quickly jumped away, Charmander and Chikorita on Moltres' right, Squirtle on his left. When he turned around to come back for another attack, Squirtle tried to hit him with a Water Gun, but a Fire Spin from Moltres caused the water to evaporate when it hit. Charmander and Chikorita tried to hit him next, sending out a Flamethrower and Magical Leaf together, but Moltres simply absorbed the attacks. "You call that a flame?" he sneered at Charmander. Moltres began to pull fire into

his beak as he said, "THIS is a flame!" He then released a Flamethrower that seemed like a wall of flames towards Charmander and Chikorita. Squirtle launched a Water Gun from the side, cooling it off at the edge, which was enough for Charmander and Chikorita to avoid being blasted into the crater by it.

Moltres then flew forward at a fast speed, intending to hit both sides with a Wing Attack. Chikorita began to gather energy through her leaf for a new attack, while Charmander launched a Flamethrower to delay Moltres' attack somewhat. While Moltres dodged the Flamethrower, Squirtle took a Power Band from the toolbox, slipping it on his wrist and charging towards Moltres. As Moltres realigned himself with the ground, Squirtle jumped up towards him, delivering an Aqua Tail into his chest. With the help of the Power Band, Squirtle managed to land a direct hit, but Moltres recovered enough to send him flying towards the ground with a Flamethrower. "Squirtle!" Charmander and Chikorita cried, as he hit the ground hard, the flames still fizzing on the ground around him while he looked like he had suffered a burn. Charmander immediately dashed over to help him while Chikorita, having gathered enough energy, unleashed a Solarbeam, the power causing Moltres to reel back for a few minutes.

Charmander reached Squirtle and helped him get up, moving him off to the side where the toolbox and bags were. Reaching into the toolbox, Charmander grabbed a Rawst Berry, giving it to Squirtle to eat. The berry instantly caused Squirtle's burn to get better, looking like he had never had a burn in the first place. Chikorita arrived after he finished the berry and asked, "Are you okay, Squirtle?" He turned to her and said, "Yeah, I'm okay now. But that was still a lot of heat in one attack." He was sweating from the moment the Flamethrower touched him, and his hair had been messed up by it. "Maybe you'd better rest and heal up a bit. We'll keep him busy," Charmander said. "But he's part Fire-type. My Water-type attacks will be very handy against him," Squirtle pleaded, not wanting to just sit and let them get hurt. "You saw how he evaporated your Water Gun, and close-range puts you at a greater risk of getting hit by him," Chikorita said. "Yeah, but…" Squirtle pleaded, too stubborn to want to just sit on the sidelines. However, they refused to let him do it, so he eventually gave in and sat with the supplies, while Charmander and Chikorita went back to try to battle Moltres.

Since Charmander took less damage from Moltres' attacks, he stayed in front, since the Fire-type attacks couldn't burn him badly. Chikorita stayed back, launching long-range attacks to complement all of Charmander's attacks. During it all, Squirtle stayed back like he was told, while the damage and marks left by the Flamethrower healed up and disappeared. He did keep a close eye on the battle, since sometimes an attack would fly either near him or towards him. He suddenly had an idea as he saw a Flamethrower by Moltres hit the spot where he had landed, and he stood up and dashed off. When Charmander and Chikorita had a break in attacking next, they looked over and were shocked to see that Squirtle seemed to have disappeared.

"It seems your friend has abandoned you. Just another bit of evidence proving that you're guilty," Moltres growled. "You're wrong on both of those! We're not here to cause trouble, and Squirtle would never abandon

his friends!" Charmander yelled. "Oh? Then where did he go?" Moltres asked, amused. Charmander and Chikorita didn't know how to respond, but they didn't need to since Squirtle called, "Try looking up!" Everyone looked up to see Squirtle close to Moltres' head, having jumped off the rocks near on the opposite side of the crater to get above the low flying bird's head. Charmander and Chikorita called out his name in relief, while Moltres moved to dodge the Aqua Tail he had prepared. He got out of the way in time, and Squirtle landed hard on his front, dislodging a loose rock where he had been knocked down before. Moltres attempted to fry him for good with another Flamethrower, but Squirtle was on his feet and away by the time it got close.

"You may have had a good plan, but it was futile! You gave away your position and now you're just prolonging the inevitable!" Moltres yelled, flying over the spot he had hit. However, Squirtle just grinned and said, "That may be, but watch your feet!" This caught Moltres' attention as he glanced beneath him to see that the spot seemed to be cracking. Suddenly, the crack burst and lava began to pour out of the hole! At this, Squirtle leapt up and yelled, "Hydro Pump!" His head, arms, legs, and tail retracted into his shell and he began shooting water out of the arm and leg holes, propelled through the air by the water he was blasting out. He spun around under Moltres, hitting the lava as it was pouring out, cooling it and making it harden into rock around Moltres as the bird looked around frantically, trying to figure out what Squirtle was doing.

Landing, Squirtle called out, "Let's hit him with the rocks all together!" Charmander and Chikorita looked at the rocks, then caught on to what Squirtle was saying. Squirtle slammed one of the rock pillars with Aqua Tail about halfway up, causing the rest of it to fall on Moltres. Charmander did likewise with Metal Claw while Chikorita used Razor Leaf. The large rocks fell on top of Moltres, beginning to bury him. "_No way… It can't be… Did he use my attack so he could create a Rock Slide?!?_" Moltres screamed out in his mind. Once all the rocks had fallen, it had created a large pile which Moltres seemed to be buried under.

Once everyone landed and caught their breath, Charmander and Chikorita were quick to praise Squirtle for his plan, to which he giggled and blushed at. There was a moment of silence for a moment when suddenly, the rock pile began to shake, and Moltres suddenly burst forth from underneath the pile!

"Urggggh!" he groaned, as while he was strong enough to get out from under the rocks, he was greatly weakened by the attack. "I'm not done! No one who defiles the mountain escapes me!" He then pulled himself up, his wings up as if he was ready to take to the air again. "Wait! Listen to us!" Charmander called out. "We didn't come here to cause trouble. We're here only because we were chased here," Squirtle said. "And you have to understand, this mountain isn't the only place that's suffering. Disasters are occurring everywhere lately," Chikorita added. "We're fugitives now, so we can't do anything, but as a Rescue Team, we want to help other Pokemon who are suffering from the disasters," Charmander finished. Moltres put his wings at his side and was silent for a moment. He then asked Team Go-Getters, "Do you say that sincerely?" Squirtle

said, "Yes, we are! If you think it's a lie… Look at our eyes!" So Moltres gazed into each of their eyes, examining them closely. Suddenly, he screeched, "GYAAAAAAH!" This shocked Team Go-Getters and made them nervous, but Moltres said, "Very well. I believe that you aren't lying." Team Go-Getters sweat dropped at this, not seeing why Moltres had to screech like that. Moltres continued, "You have my permission to pass. Continue on beyond Mt. Blaze. And… Promise me this. That you will uncover the cause of the calamities that wrack our world… And stop the disasters from bringing more destruction and suffering." Charmander said, "We will. We're being hunted now, though, so we can't get on it right away…" Moltres screeched at this, cutting him off, so Squirtle said, "Even so, we will investigate the cause of the natural calamities. And that's a promise." Moltres then said, "I will hold you to that promise. By calming my anger, you've made me believe that you will honor that promise. If you do not forget… the courage and joy you displayed in battling me. GYAAAAAAAAH!" Team Go-Getters panicked again when he screamed, Chikorita asking, "Um… I-Is there anything else?" Moltres looked down and said, "No. I was only preparing to take off." They face-faulted at this, wondering if he needed to scream before doing or saying anything. "Farewell!" he called, taking to the sky, a scream following as he vanished.

The members of Team Go-Getters looked at each other a moment before they all said, "Ewwwwwww, that was crazy!" Charmander then said, "But it's good that Moltres believed us. That's a good start for us on getting to the truth." Squirtle then grinned and said, "And he had fun battling with us. That's got to count for something, right?" Chikorita giggled at this, knowing Squirtle enjoyed it when everyone had fun in anything. She then said, "Anyway, we should probably get off Mt. Blaze ourselves." Squirtle agreed and said, "Last one down is a Slowpoke!" And at that, they started running for the slope.

Later on…

Following the slope down from Mt. Blaze, Team Go-Getters was confronted with more rocky terrain. Still, they noticed a path which they followed, which led them away from the mountain and further north. Eventually, they climbed up a small cliff as they continued on their way. As they walked along it, Squirtle stopped and looked at Charmander and Chikorita, who seemed to be slowing down, which made him feel bad, knowing they were tired because of him. They all stopped against some rocks, feeling a bit exhausted after all the walking they did.

"I'm exhausted. Let's rest for a little while," Chikorita sighed. They agreed and sat down against the rocks, though Squirtle shuffled over a bit when he noticed the nearby cliff edge, moving so he could look. "Mmm… There's a fantastic view here…" he said. Charmander and Chikorita noticed what he was doing and came over to look as well, Chikorita sitting on his left, Charmander on his right. "Yeah. This is a great spot to gaze. And look how small Mt. Blaze looks from here," Charmander said. "And you can even see most of the path we walked just to get here," Chikorita added. This scene seemed familiar to Squirtle in a way; as he looked at the rocky landscape, he could almost see himself sitting on a tree branch,

holding someone close to him as he looked out across a forest at the rising sun.

He was snapped out of it when Chikorita said, "Charmander, Squirtle." The two boys looked at her. "Remember how tough it was to get across Mt. Blaze? I don't think a lot of Pokemon can do that. And then we gave it all to get out here." The two continued to look at her, so she said, "What I'm thinking is, maybe with as far out as we've come, there aren't any Pokemon coming after us anymore." They caught on and Charmander said, "Maybe you're right, Chikorita. Maybe we don't have to keep running as much anymore." Squirtle hesitated to say this, as he didn't want them to worry, but he knew it had to be said. So he said, "That can't be. There's at least one group that's still going to come after us." Chikorita and Charmander were about to ask who, but then they knew that Squirtle was talking about Team ACT.

This seemed to bring their spirits down a bit, but they suddenly perked back up. "Yup! We don't have much of a choice, so let's keep going," Charmander said. "I think we should try to go somewhere not many others would want to go to," Chikorita suggested. Charmander agreed and said they just needed to stay positive as they moved, and then he and Chikorita stood up and began to walk again. They stopped when they realized Squirtle hadn't budged and was just watching them.

"What's the matter, Squirtle? Aren't you coming?" Chikorita asked. "I thought you guys were tired and wanted to rest. Weren't you just saying that?" Squirtle asked. "Hey, they're chasing us down. We can't rest all the time, even if we're tired. And we already said that we would go with you, Squirtle," Charmander explained. Squirtle was not convinced, and just sat there looking at them. "Come on. Knock it off with that face, Squirtle. We're fine," Chikorita said. "Yeah, so let's go. Where you go, we'll follow!" Charmander encouraged him. Squirtle glanced away just to give a small smile, showing how glad he was to have them for friends, then stood up himself and started walking with them again, ruffling his hair as they went. They followed the cliff, planning to head north where the climate would slowly get harsher the farther they went. They were hoping some answers would lay hidden in this land, answers to everything they had left town and become fugitives for.

Meanwhile, at the base of Mt. Blaze, Team ACT had just finished descending from the summit, knowing that Team Go-Getters were likely the cause of the light show that had been taking place on the summit a while ago.

"I can't believe those other Pokemon just gave up after not being able to locate Team Go-Getters and not believing they could be up on the summit. Whatever happened up there, they had to have been a part of," Tyranitar stated. "Well, it's not like all of them could make it through the Rock Path anyway. Only the tougher teams made it to the cave that leads to the summit. We only went back because they said they knew where Squirtle was," Charizard said to Tyranitar. "And it was also to give Team Go-Getters a chance to get over the mountain. I knew they were on the mountain somewhere, just not exactly where," Alakazam said to both of them. "So what now? We just keep going until we locate them?" Charizard

asked. "Indeed," Alakazam said. "Whatever energy Squirtle's body is giving off, it makes him easier to locate. This chance to get over Mt. Blaze is the last chance they will get. When we find them, we will have to deal with them." He then looked to the northern skies along with Charizard and Tyranitar, as they all made a silent wish that Team Go-Getters would locate the truth before that happened.

And so the chase continues. Up next, Team Go-Getters continues north, going through a swamp. Once there, they meet up with a local group that handles problems within, who need their help in dealing with a very big problem.

Music that inspired me:

Climbing Mt. Blaze- Mt. Blaze (PMD: Red/Blue Rescue Team), Brave Advancement (Final Fantasy X)

Moltres Attacks- Lava Piranha Round One (Paper Mario)

Squirtle's Plan- Go, Mario, Go!/Lava Piranha Round Two (Paper Mario)

Moment of Calm- Fugitive (PMD: Red/Blue Rescue Team)

Thanks for reading up to this point. Feel free to review if there's something you don't like.

PEACE BE WITH YOU ALL!

14. Shrine of Controversy

Many of you may be wondering where the idea for this chapter came from. In the games, after clearing Mt. Blaze the first time, it mentions that the hero/heroine and their partner crossed mountains, forded swamps, and scaled icy cliffs. I decided to expand on this and make it a part of my story. Hope you like it!

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Pokemon Square: Pelipper Post Office

Gengar was standing at the cliff out in front of the Pelipper Post Office, gazing out at the morning sea with a melancholy look on his face. A little over a week has passed since he spread the rumor that Squirtle was actually the human that appeared in the Legend of Ninetales, and so far, there had been no word from the Pokemon that had gone after him. This made him think that they were either still chasing him or were just taking a while in getting back from wherever he had been caught at.

"_Argh… I can't believe it… That kid, a human? I never would've thought it,_" Gengar thought to himself as he looked out at the ocean. "_I always suspected there was something different about him, but that it would turn out to be this? I don't think anyone in town would've guessed anything like that. Well, maybe Alakazam, since he was looking at Squirtle oddly that one time. He probably knew before anyone else did._"

Gengar's thoughts were interrupted when he heard Medicham and Ekans calling out to him. "What? What is it?" he asked. "Um, Team Shiftry and the other Pokemon that went after Team Go-Getters just got back. They say they lost them at Mt. Blaze and gave up, while Team ACT is continuing on to locate them," Ekans said. "Is that so? Well, that's fine then," Gengar said. "I guess so. I still can't believe that Squirtle would actually be the cause of the natural disasters. Tell me the truth, Gengar, are you sure that's what Xatu or whoever it was said?" Medicham asked. Gengar looked nervous as he said, "Uh, yeah, that's right. That's what he said. Why?" Medicham crossed her arms and said, "I don't know. I just remember hearing from those other two that Squirtle arrived the day before we messed with them. These natural disasters have been happening since long before that day, so either he really can't remember anything or something simply isn't adding up. Not that I'm actually concerned as to what happens to those babies, mind you." Ekans looked at her and said, "With as long as they've been gone, there's probably no need to even have to be worried about them. If they really haven't been caught by now, it's going to take Team ACT a while to do so." Medicham just glanced at him and said, "Better them than us. It would be a crime for this face to end up getting sullied from chasing a bunch of kids." Gengar just looked at her like she was crazy and said, "Sometimes, Medicham, you scare me."

Ekans looked over at Gengar and asked, "How come you didn't want us to join the chase anyway, Gengar? It's nice not having to do anything, but you'd think you would want to be rid of them too." Gengar got angry at this and growled, "Look, I have my reasons, got it? If I say we're not going after them, then we're not going after them! You got a problem with that, you can just go and look for them, but count me out of it!" Medicham and Ekans were both thrown off by this sudden outburst, Ekans saying, "I didn't mean it like that. I was just wondering…" Gengar turned around so they couldn't see his face and said shakily, though they couldn't tell, "I want to be alone now." They looked at each other, then did what he asked and left him there.

As his gaze fell on the sea again, Gengar thought to himself, "_Squirtle… Even though I know you can't forgive me for something like this… You'd better just come back here in one piece, kid._"

North of Mt. Blaze

Following their short rest after the battle against Moltres, Team Go-Getters continued to follow the trail to the north. As they moved on, they were forced to cross more mountains, though they were nothing like Mt. Blaze, thankfully. Having finally crossed the last mountain, they found themselves faced with a freshwater swamp, being a part of a river flowing to the east. The whole area was covered by a thick canopy that

let little sunlight touch the ground, and the water was somewhat hard to see through. They were currently walking on a part of the ground that was sticking out of the water.

"This swamp must've drained recently. The water level is really low here," Squirtle commented, as they had walked across several large branches in order to stay out of the water. "Well, I'm sure glad it has. I still have to be careful, but not as careful as if it hadn't drained at all," Charmander said, as he was worried about slipping and falling tail first. "We'd better be careful here. Swamps can support a large array of Pokemon, and we don't know how friendly they'll be. Hopefully, we can find some berries and apples to add to our supplies," Chikorita said, since they were starting to run a bit low.

Eventually, they met up with a small group of Pokemon. The Pokemon were a Beedrill, a Scyther, and a Poliwhirl. This group was a little cautious when they spotted Team Go-Getters, but they calmed down after hearing that they were on the run, trying to find the answers that would clear Squirtle's name. Although they were suspicious that Squirtle was a human, they decided to give him the benefit of the doubt.

"Are you guys a Rescue Team too?" Chikorita asked. "No, but we are part of a group that makes its base here in the swamp. Due to the size of this swamp, it formed in order to deal with all the problems since there aren't any nearby villages with Rescue Teams," Scyther explained. "Bzzzz, we're conzerned about a new problem that's popped up rezently," Beedrill said. "If you'd be willing to help, we'll tell you about it," Poliwhirl added. "Uh, can you give us a minute to talk about this?" Charmander asked. "Of courze. This izn't juzt a zimple problem we're dealing with here," Beedrill told them.

Squirtle, Charmander, and Chikorita stood near a tree, away from the small group, deciding whether they should help or not. "I don't want to leave them to deal with this problem on their own, but we still need to keep moving," Charmander said, worried about Team ACT catching up to them. "That's true, but I don't know what we should do," Chikorita said. "I think we should help them. Since the group deals with problems in the swamp, they probably know the fastest way to get out of here, which might be better than just trying to work through it on our own," Squirtle said, wanting to help them before moving on. "That's true. Then we'll help them for sure," Charmander said. They all nodded and went back to tell the three that they would help. "So what's this problem you guys were talking about?" Squirtle asked.

"Let me start from the beginning," Scyther said. "Long ago, there lived this king who made his home here back before this swamp came to be. There aren't many records, so it's unknown what kind of Pokemon the king was. However, we do know that he was a compassionate sort, as he wanted to bring the water from the river out here." Beedrill took over, saying, "It waz becauze of him that zhe zwamp came to be. Truly, he made zhe little village here zhrive by bringing zhe water here. And in hiz honor, zhe villagers erected a shrine to him, deep in zhe heart of zhe zwamp, bzzzzzzz." Poliwhirl finished up by saying, "And ever since then, everyone who lives here has taken utmost care of the shrine, preserving

it since it was made. Where the king lived may have been lost to the swampy waters long ago, but that shrine is the proof that it really did happen."

"That's some story. Wow," Squirtle said. "Yez, it iz well-known to all who live here," Beedrill said. "I can see why. But what about the problem you mentioned?" Chikorita asked. "Recently, a strong Pokemon that used to live in the forested area of the swamp came to the shrine and claimed ruler ship of the shrine and the whole swamp," Scyther explained. "Anyone who wanders into the swamp can be taken by him whenever he so chooses. When he leaves the shrine, he captures anyone that he comes across. He attacks so swiftly and from such a distance that we have never seen what he looks like. We know that everyone he captures is kept alive, but we don't know why he does it." This shocked Team Go-Getters, and Charmander asked, "So has your group been working on a way to help the ones who have been taken?" Poliwhirl nodded and said, "The problem is that since he took over the shrine, he has shrouded it and the surrounding area within a thick mist, making it extremely hard to monitor where you've been, since it's surrounded by water. However, we have something that we believe may work. We're keeping it back at the village, since it has not been discovered by that Pokemon yet. We'll show you the way." And with that, the three Pokemon began to lead Team Go-Getters into the swampy water, as they showed them the path to the village.

Within the mist in the swamp

Under the clouds of the mist, an ancient structure stood, jutting out into some of the trees. A plaque positioned out in front contained Unown text, stating that it was dedicated to the king who brought about the creation of the swamp. Inside the structure sat a Pokemon, whose identity was concealed by the darkness.

"None of these new captives have disclosed the location of the hidden village," it growled. "The only thing I admire about that is their stupidity. It takes a real fool to refuse an offer to get set free. I must say I don't like that sort of attitude." The Pokemon then stood up and began to exit the structure, saying, "Perhaps someone else would be willing to help."

The hidden village

After some minutes of walking, Team Go-Getters were led into the village. They marveled at the appearance of it. Unlike Pokemon Square, the houses were wooden huts with roofs made of straw. They were simple so that if they flooded, it wouldn't take a long time to get the materials needed to repair any damage. As they wandered through, they met many of the villagers, some of them being members of the group, known by some of the villagers as His Majesty's Swamp Service.

Poliwhirl, Scyther, and Beedrill led the way to one of the huts, which appeared to be made out of metal instead of wood. They revealed that it was actually a workshop, which was where the Swamp Service worked on special items to further protect the swamp. Two of these gizmos were just

recently finished in order to help locate the shrine and stop the Pokemon that had claimed it.

"What's this thing?" Squirtle asked, looking over a yellow tube. "That's a Sitrus Capsule. It contains the restorative juices from a Sitrus Berry. It releases the juice when bitten down on, giving a temporary boost in strength," Scyther explained. "And zhiz object iz a tracking devize and tracker. The devize iz attached to a Pokemon, and zhe tracker allowz one to pinpoint zhat Pokemon'z location," Beedrill said, pointing to a small square object and what appeared to be a gray Rescue Badge. "And both of these are going to help bring this mystery Pokemon down?" Chikorita asked. "Yes. The plan we have concocted is risky, but it's our best chance at restoring the swamp to as it was before," Poliwhirl told Team Go-Getters. "Our plan is to have a Pokemon, with the tracking device hidden on their body and the Sitrus Capsule inside their mouth, find that Pokemon and get captured by him. The tracker will allow us to work our way through the swamp to the shrine without the mist confusing us, while the Sitrus Capsule will allow the Pokemon taken captive to recover to full strength after being taken back to the shrine," Scyther explained.

"Whoa, that is a risky plan. You're sure that both of those things work right?" Charmander asked. "Absolutely. They've been field tested several times already, and they function perfectly," Poliwhirl assured him. "Well, okay then. Every plan has some risk to it anyway. We'll help you carry out this plan," Charmander said. "With both the attack and getting taken prisoner," Squirtle said. Everyone looked at him questioningly. "It's definitely going to be risky to whoever the decoy is… So I'm going to be the one who gets captured!" Squirtle declared. "WHAT?" Charmander and Chikorita exclaimed. "Squirtle, what are you thinking? The whole point of coming out this way was to try to find the truth behind the natural disasters! Even if this guy doesn't do anything extreme to whoever he takes, there's still a chance he could change that!" Chikorita cried. "And the same could happen to anyone else! But since this plan involves the decoy starting the attack from inside, it's going to require someone who can handle being in a tight situation. And I'm good at that for some reason," Squirtle said. "But… Are you sure you want to do that?" Charmander asked. "Of course. If someone else had volunteered, I would just let them. But since there's been no mention of anyone doing it, I'm willing to take the risk," Squirtle explained. Chikorita sighed, "You really are something, Squirtle. Just make sure you come back, okay?" Squirtle nodded, "I have no reason not to come back, so don't worry." Scyther then said, "Since you're obviously ready, let's get you prepped."

Hours later…

Team Go-Getters stood with Scyther, Poliwhirl, and Beedrill behind a log, which was near where the mystery Pokemon usually passed. "Okay, the capsule is safely inside your mouth, and the tracking device is safely implanted on your head. Good thing you've got that hair; it helps conceal it from view," Poliwhirl said. Squirtle rubbed his head where it was, since it still itched a bit. "I just have to bite down on this capsule, right?" Squirtle asked. Beedrill said, "Yez. But even if you zwallow it, it'll still release the juice once it haz been burnt enough. Juzt make zure it doezn't fall out of your mouth." Squirtle nodded and then went

into the swamp waters, promising he wouldn't fail and return, while the group hid out of sight.

Squirtle wandered through the waters, hoping to catch sight of whoever was going to grab him. Suddenly, he sensed something behind him and leapt as something tried to wrap itself around him. He turned around and saw something hiding among the shrubs, its long arm being what tried to grab him. "Not bad, little one. But no one can escape from me for long!" And with that, the Pokemon sent its other arm after Squirtle who took off running. "Resistance is futile!" he called. "_That may be, big guy_," Squirtle thought, "_but this has to look believable! I can't make it look like I want him to catch me."_

Squirtle ran a ways through the water before tripping on a branch that was hidden under the water. "Oh!" he cried as he fell, then he noticed that the arms were surrounding him. "Make that an uh-oh!" he exclaimed as the arms wrapped around him and dragged him back to where his captor was. As he neared the Pokemon, he began to recognize its shape, realizing that it was a Tangrowth. "I assume you're from the hidden village, correct?" Tangrowth queried. "Well, what if I am?" Squirtle asked. "Because I don't like it! So you're coming with me to tell me where it is!" Tangrowth growled. He then began to walk deeper into the swamp, Squirtle screaming all the way.

Nearby, Charmander, Chikorita, Scyther, Poliwhirl, and Beedrill witnessed the whole thing. "There goes one brave Pokemon," Scyther said. "I can't believe this is happening," Chikorita groaned. "Relax, Chikorita. This is exactly what Squirtle wanted to happen," Charmander said. "So now, let's do our part and start following," said Poliwhirl, pulling out the tracker and leading the way.

Later, at the ancient shrine

Tangrowth paced in front of Squirtle, who was sitting against the wall. "I'm sure a young one such as you has undoubtedly heard many things about me," Tangrowth said, to which Squirtle nodded. "I don't care what they say about me. I don't like it when others start talking about me behind my back, though, be it good or bad. In all honesty, I'm a reasonable sort, except when I'm angry, as you may have noticed earlier. I don't like getting angry like that, so don't make it happen again." Squirtle nodded slowly as Tangrowth looked at him. "Very good. Now tell me where the village within the swamp is located." Squirtle asked, "Uh, tell you where the village is?" Tangrowth nodded, though Squirtle could tell he was already starting to lose his patience. "Sorry. I can't. I'm not a villager, just a traveler. I don't know all the pathways, and I don't remember how I got to the village," Squirtle said, which was true. Tangrowth eyes began to show anger, but he said calmly, "Very well. You brought this on yourself. We'll see if you're willing to talk after spending some time down below." He then grabbed Squirtle, unleashing a Mega Drain as he held him up. Squirtle yelled in pain, as it was a very potent attack. As Squirtle recovered from the force of the attack, Tangrowth walked deeper into the shrine, going down a flight of stairs and continuing on until he came to a stone door. As he opened it, he said, "This will be your new living quarters until you tell me where the

village is." He then threw Squirtle inside, landing among a bunch of other Pokemon. He then walked away, slamming the door as he went.

"Ugh…" Squirtle groaned, pulling himself off of the ground. The Mega Drain did a lot more to him than he thought. "Hey, kid, you okay?" a voice asked. Squirtle turned and saw that it was a Nidorino. "I think so. But he sure can use a mean Mega Drain," Squirtle said. "Yeah, that's true. Even a Poison-type like me gets pretty whipped by it. I can't say I've ever seen you before," Nidorino said. A Bulbasaur shakily walked up to him and asked him, "Where do you come from?" Squirtle turned and said, "I used to live in a village called Pokemon Square until I was chased out." Bulbasaur looked confused, and Nidorino asked, "Why would they chase you out?" Squirtle wasn't sure he wanted everyone they met to know, so he said, "It's… Kind of a long story." A Buizel padded over and said, "Oh yeah? Well, we've got nothing but time to kill here, so go ahead and start talking." Squirtle shook his head and said, "We don't have time, if all goes as planned." He felt his head, feeling the tracking device still implanted and seeming to be working. "What do you mean, we don't have time?" Bulbasaur asked. Squirtle was busy checking his mouth for the Sitrus Capsule, but found it was not attached to the side of his cheek anymore. "Uh-oh, where's that capsule I had?" Suddenly, a Sandslash walked up to him and asked, "You… Are you a member of His Majesty's Swamp Service?" Squirtle looked up at her and said, "Not officially, but I offered to help with the rescue." Sandslash looked glad to hear this and said, "Whew, I'm glad to hear they didn't give up on that plan. I was actually one of the Pokemon working on the plan with them. I was going to be the decoy if no one else volunteered, but I got kidnapped just a few days ago. The capsule fell out of your mouth when you landed, but it landed near me, so here it is." She revealed the yellow tube in her clawed hand and held it out to him. "Now, that Tangrowth is going to come back eventually, picking out someone in the hopes that they'll crack. Usually, it's whoever he just captured, so that works in your favor. When he comes back, that's when you should bite down on it. Remember that it's only a temporary boost, so you should try to get out while it lasts. I just hope you know a move that's good against Grass-type Pokemon," she said. Squirtle reassured her that he did, then sat down to wait.

Elsewhere in the swamp

Charmander and Chikorita were sticking close to Poliwhirl, Scyther, and Beedrill as they walked through the low waters of the swamp. Poliwhirl was holding the tracker out in front, keeping an eye on its reaction to make sure they were going the right way. The tracker glowed brighter the closer they got to Squirtle. They just hoped that the fog wasn't messing them up.

After some more wandering through the swamp, the badge was beginning to shine like a lighthouse beacon, indicating that they were close. Soon the fog parted to reveal the shrine they had been searching for.

"So that's it? The shrine where that Pokemon is located?" Charmander asked. "No doubt. You won't find another building this deep in the swamp. And since the badge is glowing this brightly, that means Squirtle was definitely taken here," Scyther said. "Now, we just have to wait for

Squirtle to get out of there before we can go after the Pokemon. Once he's taken care of, we'll release everyone that he has captured," Poliwhirl explained. So they hid out of sight just in case the Pokemon came out again, waiting for Squirtle to make his move.

The hallways of the shrine

Tangrowth decided to head back to where he was keeping his prisoners, wanting to see if Squirtle was going to talk yet. "He was sure a persistent one, screaming like that all the way. No doubt he'll give in to the pressure," he murmured to himself, soon arriving at the stone door where he kept all of his prisoners. He did like one thing about this shrine: its rooms served as perfect jail cells with the right modifications, specifically the stone door.

As the door slid open, he suddenly got a face full of Ice Beam! He went flying back to the wall, slamming into it and being encased in an ice block. Squirtle came running out and sprinted down the path he had heard Tangrowth's footsteps coming from. The rest of the Pokemon were still too weak from the treatment Tangrowth had given them to be able to run out like he did. By the time Squirtle made it to the stairs at the far end of the hall, the ice was beginning to crack, and soon, Tangrowth was free once more. "I don't like this one bit! Enjoy your freedom while it lasts, because soon you'll be right back where you ended up!" Slamming the stone door shut, he took off running down the hallway after Squirtle.

In front of the shrine

Charmander, Chikorita, and the others were still hiding, keeping a watchful eye on the entrance to the shrine. Soon, Squirtle emerged from the arched doorway, running fast, faster than when he first woke up as a Squirtle. He was beginning to slow down as the effects of the Sitrus Capsule wore off, however. As soon as they saw him, Beedrill took off and swooped towards Squirtle, getting behind him and picking him up with the sides of his pointy arms and bringing him back over to the group.

"Squirtle, are you alright?" Charmander asked. "Huh… Yeah. Just feeling a little down, now that the boost has worn off," he sighed. "Oh yez, it's a very short burst of energy," Beedrill said. "Well, don't worry. We stocked up on Oran Berries because of that, so here," Poliwhirl said, handing Squirtle one. He took it and ate it in one second.

Just then, Tangrowth came roaring out through the shrine opening, his eyes falling on the group that was in the water. "So, the whole thing was plotted out! I don't like any of you one bit, and you're going to learn that the hard way!" he growled. He then lashed out with a Power Whip, sending Squirtle and Poliwhirl flying. Chikorita attempted to counter with a Razor Leaf, but Tangrowth used Vine Whip to knock them down in midair. He then launched an Ancientpower attack, which badly hurt Charmander and Beedrill. Scyther went flying at him with a Quick Attack, managing to knock Tangrowth off-balance, which gave the whole group time to recover from his assault.

Scyther and Chikorita fell back to the others, who had been knocked back onto a patch of dry ground. "He's a tricky one all right," Charmander said, looking at the towering Tangrowth. "Well, we did mention that he was a powerful Pokemon," Poliwhirl said. "We juzt need to come up with zomething that will allow uz a chance to ztrike him," Beedrill commented. Suddenly, Squirtle had an idea. "Do you guys still have the tracker with you?" he asked. "Right here, why?" Poliwhirl asked, pulling out the tracker, which had been turned off. "How does it turn on?" Squirtle asked, looking it over. "There's a switch on the back, but why are you bringing this up?" Scyther asked. "I have an idea involving this thing. I'm going to move in close, so be ready to strike him," Squirtle explained. They were confused but decided to help make sure he could get close.

As Tangrowth launched his attacks again, Squirtle began to run towards him, with his friends using their attacks to prevent Tangrowth's from hitting Squirtle. When he was up close, Squirtle leapt up at him, shut his eyes, and switched the tracker on. Due to being so close to the tracking device, the tracker suddenly lit up so bright you would need to wear a pair of sunglasses. The bright flash was enough to badly disorient Tangrowth, and he stumbled back, trying to rub the brightness out his eyes. As soon as Squirtle landed, everyone else got into position.

"FLAMETHROWER!"

"SOLARBEAM!"

"SLUDGE BOMB!"

"BLIZZARD!"

"RAZOR WIND!"

These attacks flew over Squirtle's head and hit Tangrowth like a semi on the freeway. There was enough force in this single team blast to knock out Tangrowth on the spot. Squirtle began to jump up and down happily that together they had defeated Tangrowth.

"That was some plan you had there, Squirtle, using that device to blind Tangrowth," Charmander commented. "It's amazing the plans that you come up with, you know?" Chikorita added. Squirtle giggled, then said, "Thanks. Guess sometimes, you just need to think out of the box."

As they talked, Tangrowth sat up and looked around before saying, "Hey… Where am I? What have I been doing?" He then noticed the group in front of him, especially Poliwhirl, Scyther, and Beedrill, and said, "Hey, you guys. Aren't you a part of His Majesty's Swamp Service?" They looked at each other, then Beedrill, Scyther, and Poliwhirl said that they were. "Oh wow! I'm a big fan of what your group does! Maybe you can help me figure out why I just woke up here?" Charmander asked him, "You don't remember what you were doing?" Tangrowth shook his head and said, "Nope. Last thing I remember was walking through the forest, looking for some berries. Then I heard something in one of the trees and looked up to see what it was. Turned out to be a Honchkrow, but something was different

about it." Squirtle asked, "What was different about it?" Tangrowth scratched his head as he tried to think what it was, then said, "I know. You all know what a Honchkrow looks like, right?" Some of the Pokemon nodded. "Well, most Honchkrow have blue, red, black, and white feathers on their body, but this one… His whole body seemed to be pale; I mean, he was off-color, no red feathers, and the other colors almost looked like they hadn't been in the sun in forever. And his eyes were red with black whites. As I looked into those eyes, I must've lost consciousness, since that's the last thing I can remember." Everyone was surprised by this, wondering what that Honchkrow did to Tangrowth. Scyther stepped up and said, "Well, we know what you've been doing, even if you can't remember it. Almost a week ago, you came here to this shrine, declaring yourself the ruler of it and the swamp. You then tried to destroy the hidden swamp village in an attempt to destroy the Swamp Service, taking a couple Pokemon in an attempt to learn its location. So we started working out a plan to put an end to it, which we just did a little while ago." Tangrowth looked horrified at these words and said, "Oh no… I can't believe I would want to do anything like that… I've got so many apologies to make…" Team Go-Getters walked up to him and promised they would help defend him if anyone tried to do anything to him. He was so grateful that he couldn't help but hug the team. With that, they all headed into the shrine to go help everyone being held within.

As they disappeared into the shrine, a Pokemon could be seen in the distance, watching what unfolded from the branches of a tree. "Grr… First they stop Skarmory, now this guy, even though they were both under my control… My power has recovered enough… I'll just have to see to their destruction personally." And with that, the Pokemon spread its wings and took off, leaving the swamp behind.

The following morning…

Due to making sure everything was sorted out, it was nightfall by the time all the Pokemon got back to the village, though by then, everyone had forgiven Tangrowth for what had happened. Scyther suggested that Team Go-Getters stay in one of the empty huts for the night and continue their journey in the morning. During the night, they took the tracking device out of Squirtle's head and put a bandage over the broken skin. They figured Squirtle didn't need it bugging him all the time. Now, all their new friends had led them on a shortcut through the swamp that would lead them farther to the north and were now standing at the edge, saying their goodbyes to the villagers.

"This path will lead you to the Frost Village, a small hamlet nestled on the icy cliffs up ahead. That's the last settlement around for miles, as beyond it is the Frosty Forest. Few Pokemon go out that way, so it's unknown what lies out there, but I'd be willing to bet you'll at least find a clue to the answers you seek," Scyther said. "Thank you, everyone, for allowing us to spend the night and restocking our supplies," Charmander said, as now their bags were filled to the top with berries, orbs, and various seeds. "Please, it was the least we could do for a group that put their quest on hold to restore order to our home. We only wish we could do more," Poliwhirl said. "That's for sure. If you hadn't come, there's no telling if I would've ever woken up from that out-of-

body experience," Tangrowth smiled. "We wish you luck on the rezt of your journey, Rezcue Team Go-Getterz," Beedrill said. And with that, Team Go-Getters waved farewell as they headed down the path towards Frost Village.

As they watched them go, Scyther said, "There goes a young group of real heroes." Tangrowth nodded and said, "I just hope they find what they seek so they can go home without any suspicion."

And so, Team Go-Getters proceeded north, where the weather began to get slowly colder.

* * *

Music:

Gengar's Regret- Shooting Star Summit (Paper Mario)

Into the Swamp- Stirring the Forest (Final Fantasy IX)

The Plan- Menu (Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire)

Battle with Tangrowth- Battle 1 (Final Fantasy IX)

The Swamp Restored- Bubblegloop Swamp (Banjo-Kazooie)

15. A Cold Reception

Pokemon Square: Pikachu, Pichu, and Raichu's house

As the sun could be seen a fair distance above the horizon, Pikachu, Pichu, and Raichu were beginningto wake up for the shaking the fog of sleeping off, they settled down at their table in the main room to have breakfast. As they were eating, they began to have a conversation about Team Go-Getters.

"Hey, Pikachu, what do you think Squirtle, Charmander, and Chikorita are up to now?" Raichu asked. "I'm not sure, Raichu. It's been about a week and a half since they left here. And we heard from the groups that got back about a few days ago that they lost them at Mt. Blaze. I bet they're moving north, since it gets harsher the farther north you go," Pikachu said. "But Big Brother, why would they want to go up there if the area is so dangerous?" Pichu asked, worried about Team Go-Getters. "I'm just guessing here Pichu, but I'd be willing to bet that going north would dissuade more Rescue Teams from following them. Not many Pokemon, even Rescue Teams, go up that way. Team ACT is really the only one I know of, so they're probably going to continue after them if they really did go north," Pikachu explained. "Well, the fact that not many teams go out there might mean that there are still mysteries out there. They could be hoping that the truth is somewhere up that way," Raichu suggested.

"I'm really worried about them. I don't understand why Gengar would want to have Squirtle chased out of town like that," Pichu said, sadly. "I

don't know if Gengar wanted that either," Pikachu said, causing Pichu and Raichu to look at him questioningly. "I mean, when you think about that whole scene, it really didn't sound, to me anyway, like he really had the confidence to back up what he was saying. It almost seemed like he was being forced to say what he did," Pikachu explained. "But who would want to make Gengar do that? And why?" Raichu asked. "If it turns out that that's what it is, then that's the real question. Who would want to turn a meanie, someone who does mean stuff or likes to sound tough for the sake of having fun, into... Well... A cold-hearted villain, someone who would do that just to further their own dark deeds? Whoever would take what Xatu said and use it against Squirtle would have to be afraid of him for some reason to want to have him run him out of town," Pikachu said. "So, it's possible that Gengar might've been forced into doing that because whoever told him to do it is afraid of Squirtle?" Pichu asked. "It can't be ruled out, Pichu. Gengar himself doesn't seem to be very happy about doing it, so it's a possible reason," Pikachu said. "Well, either way, we still have to believe that Team Go-Getters will remain true to their word and come home with the truth, right?" Raichu asked, and Pichu and Pikachu agreed wholeheartedly. They then went back to eating, finishing up the last bits of their breakfast.

Soon, the three were finished with their breakfast, so they went to go wash up and make sure everything was alright before leaving the house. Afterwards, the three stepped out of the house, looking down the path to see Team Shiftry standing in the square, talking amongst themselves.

"Boss, are you sure this is okay? Just that team go like this?" one of the Nuzleaf, who was male and looked a bit buff asked. "Of course! To go after them into Mt. Blaze... No thank you. I'll pass on that. But even more than that... Squirtle may be a human, but if what he's like now is any indication of what he was like as a human, then there's no way he would do something like abandon a Pokemon. I seriously doubt that, especially after he, Charmander, and Chikorita were willing to face Zapdos, even in spite of the fact that Zapdos was going to be too much for them. They saved my life... And no matter what their actual reason was, I still believe in them because they did that. I only had us join that chase because of everyone else's urging. But... there's just no way I could ever see someone like him being a bad sort," Shiftry explained. "Boss... It almost seems like you're a different Pokemon, ever since they helped you," the other Nuzleaf, who was a female and seemed to be more observant of everything, said. "Yeah... I guess I am... It's just that, except for you two, no one has really done anything like that for me. It was just something new altogether..." He paused to shake his head, then said, "Well, at any rate, we should get back to doing our rescue work. We've got to do something to pass the time while we wait for word for Team ACT, and we can't exactly shirk our work and stop helping Pokemon because we're waiting on them." And with that, he turned and headed for the Pelipper Post Office, followed by his two teammates. As she followed, the female Nuzleaf thought to herself, "_Yeah, he's definitely been changed. He used to be worried about money before, but now he's concerned about helping other Pokemon out. To cause such a change... That Team Go-Getters must be somehow able to work miracles._"

Pikachu, Pichu, and Raichu overheard all this, and then began to talk to each other. "Wow. I never even would've guess that Shiftry had changed that much," Pikachu said. "Yeah. He really believes in Squirtle as much as we do," Raichu said. "Hey, maybe we could go work out at the Makuhita Dojo. We have to do something too, right?" Pichu asked. "Good thinking, Pichu. And Team Go-Getters wouldn't want us to neglect something like getting stronger just because we're worried about how they're doing. A good workout might help us keep our faith in them up as well," Pikachu said. He turned to Raichu and asked, "How about you, Raichu? You want to do that too?" Raichu nodded and said, "You bet! I want to get stronger too!" And with that, the three ran through the town center, aiming for the dojo.

As he ran, Pichu thought to himself, "_Squirtle... I know you're still going out there. Everyone here is in your favor. Don't give up. Please come home soon..._"

North of the swamp

Following their adventure in the swamp, Team Go-Getters has been steadily been working their way further north, heading in the direction that their new friends in the swamp pointed them in. For two days, they traveled this way, picking up whatever supplies they could find, as the weather was getting colder as they went. After two days of traveling, they finally reached the mountain where Frost Village was nestled into the side of. As they reached the base, they looked up at the icy cliffs that they would have to climb to reach the village.

"This sure looks tricky, huh?" Squirtle asked, his greenish-brown eyes sweeping over the cliffs, noting that most of the paths had a lot of ice on them. "It sure does, but it'll probably be faster and less trouble than going around it will be," Charmander said. "Well, we'd better get moving then and start climbing," Chikorita said to Charmander and Squirtle, and they all moved to a slight slope that would help them begin climbing. As they climbed, they could see there was more ice on the path than what they could see at the base. As they hiked up, they slipped and fell a lot, leading to a few laughs from each of them whenever it happened. Eventually, they made it up the ledges and slopes to a large area that was cut in the rock. As they looked down, they could see Frost Village, the last settlement in this part of the north, and the gateway that would open into the true face of the north. As they considered their journey thus far, Squirtle, Charmander, and Chikorita began to descend on a nearby path towards the village entrance.

Soon, they passed through a frozen archway, finding a row of houses on both sides of the road they were standing on. As they surveyed the area, they saw many Ice-type Pokemon, as well as Pokemon that could withstand the cold conditions going about their daily lives. These Pokemon included Magmar, whose flames could provide some relief for Pokemon, Piplup, whose down made the cold bearable, its evolutions, and Ice-types like Sneasel, Snover, Spheal, Snorunt, Smoochum, Swinub, all of their evolved and pre-evolved forms, and many others. For some reason, it seemed to be a bit warmer now that they were standing on the other side of the frozen arch.

Team Go-Getters began to walk along the road, saying hi to other Pokemon as they went. Even though it was cold all around them, it was clear that these Pokemon had brightly burning spirits, and they made sure to show it. A female Cyndaquil named Cynda suggested that they stop by the Treecko Lounge and warm up for a bit, and then showed them the way. It was a simple, tall wooden building, like most of the regular houses in the village, but it was bigger inside. It served as a rest stop for anyone who came out to Frost Village. The owner was a male Treecko, who spoke with a slight Southern accent.

"Hey ya'll, who'd you bring in there, Cynda?" he asked. "Some new travelers who seem to have been on the road for a while now, Terk," she replied. "Well, I'll be. You folks sure do look that way. Been building up yourselves with all that traveling, eh?" he asked. Squirtle, Charmander, and Chikorita looked themselves over, and it became apparent that all the walking and battling they had been doing was visible. They blushed, asking themselves why they hadn't noticed this before. "Oh, I'm sure you've got bigger things to be concerned with during your travels. But take a little time off and rest here," Cynda said. "That's right, I got some of the best hospitality you'll find 'round this part of the north," Terk said. "So why don't ya'll just leave your stuff over there in that bin, and go have a seat. I'll whip ya up some hot chocolate; we aren't called the Treecko Lounge for nuthin' after all!" He then walked into the back room to begin preparing the hot chocolate, while Team Go-Getters did as he said and placed their bags in a bin reserved for travelers. They then went over to where the fireplace and chairs were and found a spot on a wooden couch that had cushions on it. Cynda decided to stick around for a while and sat in the chair next to the couch. There were other Pokemon here that greeted them as they all came over, especially Cynda since she was well-known around town.

"So, I never got a chance to ask you, but where do you three come from?" Cynda asked, as Terk was coming over with a tray of hot chocolate for everyone sitting around the fire. "Well, we come from a little place called Pokemon Square. We're a Rescue Team, Team Go-Getters," Charmander explained, and all three gestured to their badges. "Oh, really? Well, you three sure have come a long way out, then. We don't see many Rescue Teams out this far, especially one comprised of such youngsters like yerselves," Terk said as he served the hot chocolate. "It's because between the village in the swamp and our little town, things usually don't get out so out of order since we all get along with the Pokemon in the swamp, so only Rescue Teams that have business further north are usually the only ones that come out here. I believe it was a while ago that we last saw a Rescue Team. They stopped here on their way back from the Magma Cavern, after a rescue mission. I think they were called Team ACT, and were from Pokemon Square as well," Cynda added. "Oh, them? Yeah, they're really well-known back home at Pokemon Square," Chikorita said. "Uh-huh. Charmander here is that Charizard's younger brother, just so you know," Squirtle said. "Oh really? Well, it's harder to see it since he hasn't evolved yet, but I do think there is some family resemblance," Cynda noted. Charmander smiled politely, since he didn't know what to say to that.

"So, where is it you folks are headed, anyway?" Terk asked. "Oh, we're headed further north. We're hoping to find what we're looking for if we go that way," Charmander said. "Oh, really? Well, just so you know, you're going to have to talk to our village leader and get her permission," Cynda said. "How come?" Chikorita asked. "See, that there's a dangerous place up north. Full of tough Pokemon. So, in order to keep youngsters from wandering out that way, they built that gate, and anyone who wants to get through either needs to climb up that gate or get the leader's permission," Terk explained. "Whoa. Has anyone ever climbed it before?" Squirtle asked. "Oh my, no. With all that ice on it, the only way you could get over it is by flying," Cynda said. "Usually, a Rescue Request is enough to get permission, but since you don't have anything like that, you're going to have to meet with the leader and discuss this," Terk said. "Where is the village leader usually found?" Charmander asked. "He can be found in his home sometimes. I'll take you over there and we'll see if he's in. Grab your things and follow me," Cynda said, standing up. "Well, I gotta stay here and take care of things, but I'll be wishing you luck with earning the leader's favor," Terk said as they went to get the toolbox and the other bags. They thanked him for the hospitality and for wishing them luck as they headed out the door after Cynda.

The four of them walked through the village, Cynda introducing Pokemon and pointing out some shops along the way. Soon, they stood in front of the leader's house, which had a sign proclaiming it as that and having a sort of cloth hanging over the door, which was different from the other houses they'd seen so far. Cynda knocked to see if the leader was in, and they heard a somewhat deep voice say they could enter. They entered into the one-room house, and they saw a male Weavile sitting cross-legged on a mat, eyes closed as if meditating. He opened his eyes when the door closed and stood up upon seeing his guests, and they could see he had a blue scarf wrapped around his neck, hanging like Team Go-Getters' scarves.

"Ah, Cynda. Good to see you again," he stated. "Likewise, village leader. I bring with me a Rescue Team that wishes to travel farther to the north," Cynda explained. "A Rescue Team, you say? These three?" the Weavile asked. "Yes. They are searching for something, and believe that it may be located up to the north," Cynda said. Weavile walked towards Team Go-Getters, examining them carefully, starting with Chikorita and moving to Charmander. When he got to Squirtle, he examined him very carefully, looking at his hair and deep into his eyes as if intrigued. "Hmm... A group of young travelers wanting to proceed north..." he murmured.

"Leader Weavile?" Cynda asked, wondering what he was thinking. He then turned around and asked, "Tell me, what would compel young ones such as yourselves to come seeking the frozen land to the north?" Charmander, Chikorita, and Squirtle looked at each other, then Charmander said, "We'll tell you, but please let us get all the details out sir." Weavile nodded and said, "I didn't become leader because of my ferocity. Feel free to stay and listen, Cynda." Cynda decided she wanted hear the reason too, so she sat down as Team Go-Getters began to explain. They mentioned everything that had happened. What they learned at the Hill of the

Ancients, Squirtle's mysterious dreams, Gardevoir, Gengar telling everyone in Pokemon Square that Squirtle was a human, and everything that had happened since then. Through it all, Cynda continued to look shocked at what they had all gone through, while Weavile remained in his calm composure. Once they finished, there as a bit of silence in the hut. Finally, Weavile said, "So, that's why you wish to go north. It is possible that the answers you seek are to the north. As I'm sure you've heard, it's very rare for anyone to go searching for anything beyond this village due to all of the fierce Pokemon that way. So while you sure sound like you've gone through a lot to make your way out here, I can't let you pass without seeing it firsthand." Chikorita asked, "What do you mean?" Weavile turned to the team and said, "Not far from where the entrance to the village is, there's a cave known as the Snow Path. It is full of Pokemon that live beyond the gate, so most of the villagers have never seen the other side. What I want you to do is get through the cave while escorting me." Squirtle raised his hand and asked, "Where does the Snow Path empty out, sir?" Weavile said, "I'm afraid I can't tell you that. However, if you can guide me to the end, I will know that your tale is entirely sound and allow you to pass. It will also help prepare you for the north, as some of the Pokemon from beyond the gate live in the Snow Path. So what do you say now?" Squirtle, Charmander, and Chikorita looked at each other a moment and nodded, then agreed to the challenge. With that, Weavile headed for the door, asking Team Go-Getters to follow him. He also told Cynda, who still seemed a bit shocked by the tale she heard, to let anyone who came looking for him know that he was conducting business, then closed the door. Cynda snapped out of her daze and silently wished Team Go-Getters luck.

The foursome began to walk through the village, passing Pokemon who stopped to wonder what their leader was doing. They went past the arch that was the entrance to the village, and he led them over to a spot where the mountain surrounded the village from the winds. Soon, they all caught sight of a cave in the side of the rock. "This is the Snow Path," Weavile explained. "Escort me to the end to gain my permission to pass the gate." With that, Team Go-Getters walked into the Snow Path with Weavile following behind.

As they entered the cave, they noticed that the floor seemed to look like ice, yet it did not seem as slippery. They could see some snow as they walked, possibly either leaking in from somewhere or blown in by the wind. They stayed close together and alert to anything that could come at them, wanting to make sure no harm came to Weavile.

As they worked their way through the cave, they ran into a group of Furret, who tried to confuse them with speed, several Nosepass who tried to confuse them with their northward stares and repel them with their rocky hides, Azurill who went bouncing around and was hard to hit, and Pineco who took great pleasure in trying to blow up right next to them. Through it all, they kept moving and protected Weavile whenever an attack was coming at him. Weavile said that he would try to avoid assisting unless necessary, but that didn't happen while they were walking. They also found they were able to take advantage of the cavern floors and walls when they were attacked, using the slightly slick floors and snow-covered walls to their advantage. This helped since the Pokemon that

lived in the Snow Path were tough, just like Weavile said they would be. Even so, they persevered in the face of toughness.

Sooner than they expected, they could see a light up ahead, signaling the end of the cave. Making sure Weavile was okay, they headed for the exit and found themselves... back where they started? Team Go-Getters looked confused, even more so when Weavile started laughing at the look on their faces. "Ha ha ha! That's a look I never get tired of when I see it!" The three began to get annoyed at the way he was treating this, so he calmed down and explained. "See, it's hard to see when you first walk in because of that rock splitting it into two paths, but the Snow Path is a winding cave. It has passages in it, but the one true path leads right back to the entrance. That's just the way it is." Team Go-Getters groaned at this realization, and Chikorita asked, "So what was the point of that whole thing?" Weavile said, "I told you, I wanted to see what you're made of for myself. Sometimes, you can't believe things unless you see them with your own eyes. And I'm convinced after the way you three handled that mission. You've got excellent teamwork, protect each other and whoever you might be escorting, and can come with original strategies when the need arises. And having seen all that, I will allow you three to press onward to the far north." Team Go-Getters cheered, Squirtle jumping up and down a bit because he was happy. Weavile told them to head back to his house so he could give them the paper they needed to show to the gatekeeper to pass.

When they got back his house, they found Cynda anxiously awaiting their return. "You're back! And everyone's okay, too!" she exclaimed. "Of course, Cynda. Team Go-Getters made sure of that, so they have my permission to go on." Cynda was happy for the three and congratulated them while Weavile wrote out the slip of paper needed to open the gate. Once that was done, he offered to see them off, which they agreed to and Cynda said she'd come too after she asked Terk if he wanted to as well.

At the gate, they met the Abomasnow gatekeeper, who looked a little surprised to see the village leader, who simply said he wanted to see this new Rescue Team off and that there was nothing to worry about. After looking over the paper, the Abomasnow pushed the button in his station that raised the gate. While the gate was rising, Cynda and Terk showed up to see them off. After a few minutes, the gate was opened to the point that they could get past it.

"Follow the mountain trail, as it's the safest path to take. Once you get down, you'll have a bit of walking to do, but you'll eventually reach what's known as the Frosty Forest. That's about as far as anyone from the village has ever gone, so no one here knows what's beyond there," Weavile explained. "So maybe the answers to your questions lie beyond there. Cynda told me everything, so I just had to come see you three off. I sure hope you find what you're looking for," Terk said. "Please be careful, Team Go-Getters. I want to see you three come through here again," Cynda said. The trio thanked everyone for everything, and then started on their way.

As they watched Team Go-Getters leave, Weavile thought to himself, "_There's no doubt about it. He must be the one. Stay close to your friends and never give up, guardian._"

As Team Go-Getters continued along the path, a familiar figure was watching them walk along the mountain trail, watching every movement they made closely as if planning for something.

"Excellent. Now that those fools are out of the village, they're going to be far away from any help by the time they come down. Which will make eliminating them all the more easier, especially him," the figure murmured as he watched the Rescue Team.

* * *

Music:

The New Shiftry- Kakariko Village (The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time)

Frost Village- Holoska Hub Day (Sonic Unleashed)

The Snow Path- Ice Cavern (Final Fantasy IX)

Snow Believers- Star Born Valley (Paper Mario)

Mystery Foe- The Unsent Laugh (Final Fantasy X)

16. Old Foe, New Outcome

In a different world: Twinleaf Town, the Sinnoh region

"I'm sorry, but there's no new information on his whereabouts. We'll keep searching, but there's not much else we can do," a man in a brown coat said to a man and a woman. "Alright, Looker, thanks for the update," a man with long black hair that was wrapped in a ponytail, a black vest, blue jeans, and brown shoes said. With that, the International Police officer left the house and went to go contact a fellow member. The man and the woman, who was his wife, walked over to the table in the kitchen and sat down. He looked over to his wife, who had blue hair, a white long-sleeve shirt, a red apron around her waist, blue pants that went just past her knees, and slippers, and said, "Don't worry, Jo. Our son will be fine, no matter what the situation." She looked over at the man and said, "I know. I just can't help but worry all the same." The man smiled and said, "That's the sign of a great mother, you know." Johanna smiled at him for cheering her up, then said, "I think I'll take Jumpy and go make sure the Gracidea flowers he likes are still doing well." The man nodded and said, "Alright, Jo, I'll let you know if I see anything on the news." With that, Johanna headed for the back door.

As she released her Kangaskhan and went to get her watering can, she looked to the sky and thought, "_Honey... Your father and I have faith in you. And your Pokemon have been looking for you ever since you vanished. Please be okay. I don't want anything to happen to you..._"

North of Frost Village

"AH-CHOO!" sneezed Charmander. "Gesundheit," Squirtle sleepily told him. After leaving Frost Village, Team Go-Getters followed the mountain path around, stopping in a small cave in the side to stay warm while they slept for the night. Now, morning had come and they were just starting to wake up, with a sneeze from Charmander helping them.

"Brr... It's sure cold out here," Chikorita stated, shivering a bit. "Yuck... My nose is all runny, and it's freezing out here," Charmander groaned. "Sorry, guys. You shouldn't have to go through all of this," Squirtle said, feeling guilty for causing them to come out this way. "Squirtle, it's okay. We told you we'd stick by you, no matter what," Chikorita said, concerned. "Yeah. So you don't have to worry about what we think, okay?" Charmander said. "Yeah, I know. I just worry more about you guys than that," Squirtle said. Charmander and Chikorita smiled at him when he said that. There was no way he could've been the human in the legend as far as they were concerned. With that, they settled down to have some apples and berries for breakfast. They had to be careful about what they ate, since it was possible that some of their food supplies could've frozen overnight. They ate quickly and with little talk, wanting to get back on the road as soon as they could. They were soon done, so they grabbed the toolbox and their bags, and left their cave to continue along the mountain path.

After a while of walking, the silence that surrounded the area was something they weren't accustomed to, so they began to talk with each other to alleviate the tension. "This is one lonely place," Squirtle started, looking out at the expanse of trees below them. "It sure is. And look how deep the snow is, even up here," Charmander added, looking at some of the patches of snow along the path. "And we haven't seen any Pokemon since we left the village. Even when we were climbing the cliffs on the other side, we saw some other Pokemon," Chikorita said. "Maybe we're going to be alone out here for a while," Charmander said. Squirtle, who was walking a little bit in front, said, "Nah. There's no way we could be..." Squirtle suddenly stopped walking, and Charmander and Chikorita looked at him. "What's the matter, Squirtle? Why'd you stop?" Charmander asked. "Is someone there?" Squirtle asked, looking a bit ahead. Charmander and Chikorita turned to where he was looking, and noticed what looked like a Pokemon on the path. And it seemed to be looking out across the trees.

What they saw was a four-legged Pokemon that had a white fur coat, red eyes, a sword-like tail, what seemed to be a spike on its head, and a black face and claws. "Hm?" it murmured upon noticing the three Pokemon looking at it. "Hello?" Chikorita asked. A moment passed after Chikorita spoke up, then suddenly the Pokemon leapt off the cliff and disappeared into the trees.

"Who was that? It looked like a Pokemon," Squirtle said. "Hmm. I'm not sure. But we certainly didn't just imagine a Pokemon standing there," Charmander said. "I wonder what that Pokemon was doing out here in this lonely place?" Chikorita wondered. "Maybe we're not the only ones who are

looking for a place that most Pokemon wouldn't want to go to?" Squirtle suggested. "Who knows? But thinking about it isn't going to help us any, so we'd better keep moving," Charmander said. Squirtle and Charmander noticed Chikorita had moved a bit up the path, as if looking for something. "It looks like it's just a little bit further this way. I think the trail goes down a slope and continues to the north," Chikorita told them. "So that must be the path that Weavile told us to follow," Squirtle said. "Then we just have some more walking to do before we arrive at the Frosty Forest. My brother told me that a lot of Ice-types like the ones we saw in the Snow Path are there, so Weavile was right. That mission we had will help us when we get there," Charmander said. With these words as encouragement, Squirtle and Charmander caught up with Chikorita and they then began to walk side-by-side, aiming for the slope that would put them on the path to the Frosty Forest.

Later, after a bit more hiking...

Team Go-Getters finally came to the end of the mountain path, finding that there was indeed a slope that would lead them down and onto the path to the Frosty Forest, which seemed to be the collection of trees way up the path. Seeing the path laid out in front of them and with no Pokemon seeming to be around, the Rescue Team began to jog down the slope in order to keep warm and get a move on.

A short distance away from where the slope joined the rocky ground, there was patch of snow nestled between a group of trees. Hidden under this snow was a Honchkrow, who, despite being under snow, could see very clearly who was coming. "_That's it. Just a little closer..._"

Team Go-Getters began to walk along the path, keeping an eye out for anything that might come out from the trees at them. What felt like a sudden tremor made them stop walking. "Did you guys feel that?" Chikorita asked, looking around. "Yeah, it felt like a quake might be starting. We should probably get away from here, since a lot of snow could fall if an earthquake does hit," Charmander said. Having said that, Charmander and Chikorita began to move, but Squirtle stayed put, letting his feelings stretch out. He began to look around carefully, sensing something but unable to pinpoint where or what it was. Suddenly, off to the side, he noticed a patch of snow surrounded by trees shake, indicating something was under it. He didn't like the way it was moving, and took off after Charmander and Chikorita. As he began to quickly dash towards them, something burst out of the patch, aiming for Charmander and Chikorita! Thanks to noticing that something was amiss, Squirtle managed to reach them before their attacker did and pushed them out of the way, just narrowly missing being hit himself!

As they pulled themselves off of the ground, they looked to see what had almost hit them, as they heard it hit a tree and knock it over. What they saw made them all worried. It was a Honchkrow, but it looked very different from a regular Honchkrow. Its overall coloring was pale, giving it a very chilling appearance, and its eyes were bright red while the whites were black. It was fluttering in the air, slowly coming to land on the ground a fair distance away from the team.

"Not bad, guardian. It seems you've still got some skill, even as you are," it said, and it became apparent that it was a male. "Guardian? Who's that? And who are you?" Squirtle asked, since it seemed that Honchkrow was talking to him. "I am Faust. Don't tell me you've forgotten me, guardian. You should at least remember our first encounter here, back at Mt. Steel," the Honchkrow said, his head seeming to be looking at the ground as he spoke. "Mt. Steel? Wait! Are you that same Honchkrow we ran into on one of our missions there?" Faust nodded. "But you didn't look like this back then," Chikorita said. "True. But I had only begun to recover my power, so I didn't look much different from a regular Honchkrow. And now that I have recovered somewhat, you see what I truly appear to be," Faust explained. "But why did you call Squirtle 'guardian?'" Charmander asked. "Why don't you tell them, guardian?" Faust sneered. "Tell them what? What are you talking about?" Squirtle asked, very confused. Somewhere in his mind, it seemed familiar, but he didn't know why. "Hmm... It would appear you've forgotten who you are," Faust said, then his beak displayed a smirk. "If that's the case, then destroying you once and for all will be simple! You got lucky at Mt. Steel because I was recovering, but now that I know who you are, you'll never find that out for yourself! Prepare to die!" Team Go-Getters immediately took their battle stance, Charmander saying, "Don't count on it! We've worked long and hard for and with our friend, Squirtle, and you're not going to take him away from us!" Faust raised his head at this and sneered, "Brave words, little boy! But you should know that I always get what I want in the end, and today is the end of your blue friend!"

Suddenly, Faust seemed to vanish. "Huh? Where did he go?" asked Chikorita. Team Go-Getters assumed a triangle position, keeping an eye out for him, since they could sense that Faust was still nearby. Suddenly, Chikorita got tapped on her right shoulder, and she turned thinking it was Squirtle. Instead, it was Faust, who gave her quite a fright! "EEK!" She exclaimed, totally scared by Faust's Astonish attack. As Charmander and Squirtle turned to help her, they got clipped across the face by a Night Slash attack, sending them flying a bit. He then turned back to hit the still shocked Chikorita with a Wing Attack, but she recovered just in time to jump over it and landed a Body Slam on him, which left him paralyzed. She then dashed over to Squirtle and Charmander to make sure they were alright.

"Are you guys okay?" she asked, worried. "Yeah, we're fine. But he sure is quick," Charmander commented, rubbing his head. "Maybe if we use teamwork, we can confuse him?" Squirtle suggested, flipping himself upright. "Let's see what else he can do first, then decide on a strategy, okay?" Charmander said, and Squirtle and Chikorita nodded. As Faust began to recover from the paralysis, they moved their bags off to the side, just in case they needed the supplies later.

"Think you're clever, eh? Well, it'll take a lot more than that to stop me! Dark Pulse!" Faust yelled, unleashing a wave of purple circles towards Team Go-Getters. They moved quickly, separating and getting out of the attack's path, avoiding the blast created when it hit the ground. After dodging, Charmander sent a Flamethrower at Faust, who dodged simply by moving to the side, as if it wasn't even an attack. Chikorita sent out a Magical Leaf, hoping to knock Faust off balance with a sure fire move.

Suddenly, Faust yelled, "Shadow Rush!" and became shrouded by a purple aura. He pushed right through the leaves and aimed for Chikorita. Squirtle jumped in front of her and yelled, "Protect!" surrounding himself with a green barrier in order to protect Chikorita. Faust's attack proved to be too strong however, and he broke past the protect and slammed into both Squirtle and Chikorita, leaving them both in pain due to the energy of the Shadow-type attack. Squirtle and Chikorita hit the ground hard, while Faust landed a bit shakily, his body sparking with the shadow energy as it affected his health. Charmander took advantage of his and launched a Fire Spin before he could recover, trapping Faust in a fiery vortex. Charmander then ran over to his bag and grabbed two Oran Berries from it, and got them over to Squirtle and Chikorita. They quickly ate them up and the scars left by the Shadow Rush vanished.

"I've never seen an attack like that before," Chikorita said, still a bit surprised at how it affected not just her but Squirtle as well. "It hurt us, but it looks like he got hurt as well," Squirtle noted, remembering that Faust seemed to have sparked after the attack ended. "Maybe we can use it to our advantage somehow," Charmander suggested, as Squirtle and Chikorita got back up and back into stance.

Faust managed to break free of the Fire Spin and growled, "YOU LITTLE PUNK! I'M GOING TO ENJOY MAKING YOU PAY FOR THIS!" He then unleashed a Haze attack, obscuring their view with a black fog. Once again, Team Go-Getters took a triangle position to look for Faust. As Squirtle's eyes closed, he thought he saw something flicker before he opened them again. So he closed them again and focused on trying to see what had flickered. Suddenly, he could sense the energy of everything around him, including Faust's incoming Dark Pulse! "Heads up!" Squirtle called, and they all quickly broke formation to get away. Thanks to Squirtle's warning, they were far away from their position by the time the attack hit. The created explosion caused the haze cloud to disperse as well. "_Grr... His aura must be coming to him. It must've been sealed before, but now it's starting to come out again. No wonder I couldn't tell it was him before,_" Faust thought to himself.

"Whew, that was close," Squirtle said, wiping the sweat off his forehead. "Yeah, but you sure picked a good time to warn us," Charmander said. They then got back together and prepared to face Faust. "Perhaps. Or maybe he just got lucky, like when battling my servants, Skarmory and Tangrowth," Faust said. "Wait. Skarmory... And Tangrowth? Were you responsible for how both of them were acting?!" Chikorita demanded. "They stood no chance against me. And those who fail to win become my servants," Faust simply stated. "Why would you want to do something like that?!" Squirtle exclaimed. "Simple, no-brains. It's much easier to begin conquering the world by simply forcing Pokemon to do what you say. Those two, along with so many others soon, will be the tools I need to conquer this puny world!" Faust declared, eyeing them evilly.

"Not if we have anything to say about it!" Squirtle yelled, and Charmander and Chikorita backed him up. "Touching, but without your aura abilities guardian, that's not going to happen. Now, be gone from my sight. Shadow Wave!" Faust yelled, and a shadowy pyre fly came out of his mouth, splitting off into three smaller flies and heading for Team Go-

Getters. Try as they might, the trio could not escape from the move and they all got hit, the energy badly affecting them. As they were hunched over trying to catch their breath, Faust looked down on what he thought were his defeated opponents. "You see? You're all just weaklings who need to be put in their place so that you know what it's like to serve your master of darkness. Oh, how I've been waiting for the day when the guardian would finally be under my control. Once I've tainted your aura, no one will be able to stop me," Faust proclaimed. He couldn't tell, but ever since the Shadow Wave had hit him, Squirtle could feel the energy in his body trying to release itself, and Faust's words did the trick, as Squirtle's body began to glow lightly, which caught Charmander and Chikorita's attention, yet Faust failed to notice it.

"Soon, it will all be mine. Everything will... Hmm?" At this point, Faust noticed what seemed to be a blue fog appear. He glanced around a bit, then turned to Team Go-Getters, only to get hit hard with a fist. It was such a powerful and fast hit that he thought his eyes were going to pop out of his head. It sent him flying quite a distance. Charmander and Chikorita looked ahead at who had sent him flying, seeing Squirtle there, this time he was glowing light blue all over instead of having an aura surround him. The aura that stretched out on top of his head was blowing in the wind, just like his hair was. And from the look of things, he had just launched a Focus Punch at Faust.

Faust came flying back moments after he had landed, seething in anger. "How dare you attack me! YOU WILL PAY FOR THIS, GUARDIAN!" he screeched, coming in with a Shadow Break. However, Squirtle suddenly seemed to vanish, appearing above Faust and landing an Aqua Tail at the critical spot. As he landed, he spoke, and he sounded deeper than he usually did. "It doesn't matter what you do, Faust. Me and my friends will never let you get away with trying to dominate the world. And together, we will defeat you!" These words inspired Charmander and Chikorita, and so they stood up, moving to a different place to prepare for a three-way finishing attack. Faust came charging back at Squirtle with a Shadow Blitz, who intensified his aura to generate a mini shield. Faust attempted to push through it, but Squirtle held strong, his wounds having been healed when he went into Aura Overdrive. After a few moments of struggling, Squirtle suddenly pushed Faust into the air and yelled, "NOW!" With that signal, Charmander and Chikorita launched their attacks as Squirtle did the same.

"FIRE BLAST!"

"SOLARBEAM!"

"HYDRO PUMP!"

In their triangular formation, the attacks all channeled towards Faust, striking him with a powerful fury. The attacks ended with a large explosion that sent Faust towards the ground, landing on his head and appearing to be defeated. After that, the glow around Squirtle shone brighter for a second, then it vanished, returning him to normal. They cheered, but quickly began to gather up their bags, wanting to get far away from Faust by the time he woke up, but didn't notice that he was

struggling to stand up. They turned around when they heard a noise, only to see Faust charging up one more Shadow move! "SHADOW STORM!" he screeched, releasing a tornado made entirely of Shadow energy! Caught off guard, they could only attempt to dodge, but it came too fast. It caught up to them, swirling them around before suddenly exploding!

During the chaos of the explosion, Faust managed to muster enough energy to fly away from the battle area. "That was too close," Faust muttered, breathing heavily as he struggled to stay airborne. "Any more damage and they would've broken me down. But I won't make the same mistake next time. Next time, I'll make good use of the guardian's amnesia and make sure he has no help. And when I engage him, it will be at full strength..." Faust then giggled to himself, sounding a bit frenzied as he did so.

Later...

Following the explosion created by the Shadow Storm, the members of Team Go-Getters had been knocked unconscious. Having laid on the ground for a while, Charmander and Chikorita began to regain consciousness.

"Oh man... What happened?" groaned Charmander, feeling sore all over. "Um... I think Faust launched one last attack at us, and we must've been knocked out by it," Chikorita said. They looked around and noticed that Faust wasn't there anymore. "He must've just been content with knocking us out. So I guess it was kind of a draw," Charmander said. "But at least he's gone. So let's get..." Chikorita stopped short of what she was going to say, looking around some more. Charmander looked back at her and quickly figured out why she stopped, looking around a bit worriedly himself. Soon, they both stated the same worried question that had entered their minds.

"WHERE'S SQUIRTLE?!"

Elsewhere

Squirtle was laying on the ground, face down and the toolbox open next to him. During Faust's Shadow Storm, he had gone a bit higher than Charmander and Chikorita and ended up being blown into the mess of trees, far away from them. A distance away, a figure spotted him and walked over. Looking the Pokemon in front of him over a bit, the figure crouched down and hoisted Squirtle onto his back, along with the toolbox and the supplies that hadn't been scattered. With both securely on his back, the figure began to walk away from the area, Squirtle unconscious through it all.

* * *

Music:

Parent's Belief- A Fleeting Dream (Final Fantasy X)

Journey to the North- Kamui of the Northern Lands (Okami)

Team Go-Getters vs Faust- Seymour Flux (Final Fantasy X)

Faust's Last Shot- Final Boss (Sonic the Hedgehog 3)

Missing Friend- In Search of X (Metroid Fusion)

17. Icy Training

Path to Frosty Forest

Following their confrontation with Faust, Charmander and Chikorita awoke to find Squirtle had gone missing. They weren't sure what happened to him, as the explosion caused by Faust's Shadow Storm knocked both of them out quickly. As a result, they didn't know if Faust had taken him or something else had happened, but they were searching the area near where they had fought Faust, hoping he hadn't been knocked very far.

"Oh man, what could've happened to Squirtle? Where did he go?" Charmander kept muttering to himself, almost frantic that his friend had just seemingly been blown away. "Please, Squirtle... Please... Be okay..." Chikorita said to herself, trying to not break down in worry as they searched. They kept searching the trees in the and clearings that were near the battle site, saying and doing what they could in order to keep both of their hopes up. Eventually, they had searched that whole general area and came up with nothing, not even any sign that he might've landed somewhere.

"If he's not around here, then maybe he got thrown farther by that attack. I hope that's the case, because we won't able to find Faust if he took Squirtle," Charmander said, afraid of that possibility being true. "Well, we have to find him, and soon!" Chikorita stated, and Charmander nodded. "Let's keep moving up the path, but we'll be sure to check the wooded areas. It's more likely that he could've landed in somewhere in the trees," Charmander said. "Okay, then, let's remain calm and get moving," Chikorita said. With that said, they picked up their bags and began to continue heading north.

As they walked on, Chikorita could feel a slight pain in her heart, and she wondered what it could be. "_Why am I feeling this? I've never felt it until now. Is it because we don't know where Squirtle is and I'm really worried about him? No, it must be something else. It must be... Oh please, Squirtle. Please be okay._"

In a cave hidden by the trees

Deep within the mess of trees, there was what appeared to be a hole in the ground. Inside of this hole was a passage that emptied out into a sizable room, where there were several beds made of hay on the ground. Squirtle was laying in one of these beds, the injuries he suffered from the Shadow Storm having been healed. Next to his bed were his scarf and the toolbox. Squirtle continued to lay on the hay, seeming to be sleeping, though not the way he normally did, since he was just laying there. As he slept a figure began to walk in from the passage. The figure

was covered in white fur and walked on four legs. It slowly began to approach him, examining him throughout as it continued to get closer. It stopped once it stood right next to him and regarded the sleeping turtle for a moment.

Suddenly, the figure crouched down, right next to Squirtle's face, and said, rather loudly, "WAKE UP!!!" This immediately snapped Squirtle out of his sleep, as the loudness of the voice seemed to make him vibrate, exclaiming "WAAH!?" as he shook all over. Soon, he calmed down somewhat and backed up against the wall behind him, looking at the Pokémon in front of him. "How long were you planning to just lay there? Get up already!" the Pokémon said angrily, not seeming the least bit amused. "Who the heck are you?!?" Squirtle shouted, a bit nervous about the position he was in. "_I think I've seen a Pokémon like this before... No matter. Could he have fallen under Faust's influence as well? He sure yells loud enough,_" Squirtle thought as the Pokémon made no movements. "Hmph. Looks like you're wide awake now," the Pokémon said, beginning to turn around slightly. He then said, "So, if that's the case," he began, back now fully facing Squirtle, then quickly turning back around, "LET'S EAT!" When he had turned around, he had a rather big tray of various foodstuffs on it. "WHOA! No way, he's a good guy!" Squirtle exclaimed, mouth watering at the site of the food on the tray.

A little while later, the two of them had eaten much of everything on the tray, with none of the plates on it looking anything like they had when they had started eating. As they ate, they had been making some small talk, and Squirtle learned that the Pokémon was an Absol, and just now learning that Absol was the one who had found and helped him, bringing him back to his cave. "Oh, so you're the one who helped me. Thanks a lot!" Squirtle said before shoveling some rice into his mouth. "By the way, are you sure it's okay to be eating this much food?" he then asked. Absol finished chewing some rice balls and said, "Of course it is. I've got a lot stored up down here. But back to what you said first. How did you end up in the forest, beaten up as you were?" At this, Squirtle glanced down a bit and said, "Oh... Me and my friends, Charmander and Chikorita, were fighting this Honchkrow named Faust." Absol's eye twitched when he heard that name. "_Faust? The great evil is out there? That must be what I sensed when I first saw Squirtle._" He then asked, "So what happened?" Squirtle continued, "He said some stuff to me, and then we got into a fight. We thought we had him after I somehow unleashed what he called an Aura Overdrive. But he managed to get enough strength to launch one last attack at us while our backs were turned." Absol processed this information he had heard, thinking, "_Aura Overdrive? Only one with a strong aura can ever have that kind of ability, or at least that's what I heard from a Lucario once. And their kind is really the only one that have a strong enough aura for it. So that must mean..._" He then snapped back to himself as Squirtle said, "I must've lost consciousness after the attack was done. I hope Charmander and Chikorita are okay too. That sure was a devastating blow," He then bit some corn before saying, "But... Next time isn't going to be like this at all. I'll find Charmander and Chikorita, and we'll train up so that next time, we'll be sure to send him packing." Absol couldn't help but grin to himself after he heard that.

Absol then raised himself up on his legs and said, "So, Squirtle, your desire to be strong for others grows all the more with the loss, doesn't it?" Squirtle nodded and said, "Yeah! How'd you know?" Absol simply said, "No reason. Just a lucky guess." He then began to head towards the entrance to his cave and gestured for Squirtle to follow him. Before going after him, Squirtle grabbed the toolbox, put his scarf on, and then followed him outside.

After they exited the cave, Absol began to head past some trees, Squirtle silently following behind. He didn't know where Absol was leading him, but he had a feeling that he could trust Absol. Soon, they arrived at the entrance to a cave in the side of a cliff. "See this cave, Squirtle?" Absol asked, and Squirtle nodded. "This is my training ground. The caves in here are perfect for preparing for the Pokémon that live in the Frosty Forest. I know you may have gotten something similar while you were in Frost Village, but I know firsthand what it's like in Frosty Forest and I want to make sure you're strong enough. So I'm going to accompany you into this cave, where you will need to learn how to handle yourself in a winter environment. If you can prove that you can adapt to different situations, then I will know that you will be able to handle Frosty Forest." Squirtle then said, "Well, that sounds like a good idea. But what about Charmander and Chikorita?" Absol could tell that Squirtle was really worried about them, so he thought a moment, then he said, "I'll accompany you on your first go through the cave. After that, you'll continue to train on your own while I see if I can locate them. Does that sound okay?" Squirtle agreed, then they both went into the cave.

Absol's Training Ground

As they proceeded through the cave, Absol and Squirtle began to have a conversation. "I didn't ask back at my cave, but why did you come out here?" Absol asked. Squirtle looked away for a second, then said, "It's because I'm being hunted down as a fugitive." Absol was surprised at this, so he asked, a little bit suspicious, "A fugitive? What did you do?" Squirtle said, "You see, I'm not actually a Squirtle. I'm really a human." At this, Absol's surprise disappeared and he said, "A human? Oh, I get it. The Legend of Ninetales, right?" Squirtle nodded and said, "Yeah. My friends and I came all the way out here, hoping we could find out if the legend is true or not." Absol felt a bit better about Squirtle, so he said, "Well, I don't know how much of it is true, given that I know a lot of legends and myths, but I do know how you feel." Squirtle looked up at Absol, wondering what he meant, so Absol said, "My kind are known as the Disaster Pokémon. Our sense for detecting disaster before it occurs in very strong. Yet because of that, most other Pokémon believe that we're responsible for the disasters." Squirtle looked a bit surprised and said, "I didn't know Pokémon would think that too." Absol nodded and said, "It is a bit surprising, I know. That's part of the reason that I came out here: to get away from all those accusations." Squirtle smiled, now knowing that he wasn't the only who could be falsely accused, then thought about what Absol said and asked, "What's the rest of the reason why you came out here?" Absol simply gave him a stony look, but said, "I was asked to wait here for someone. And when I meet them, I'm supposed to go with them and protect them." Squirtle simply said, "Oh."

Suddenly, they both stopped walking, sensing something nearby. They scanned the area they were in, seeing that it was an open room and they were in the middle of it. Squirtle tried to focus on anything that would tell him what it was he and Absol had sensed. As he closed his eyes to try to listen, suddenly, he could sense energy signatures approaching them, seeing the energy even though his eyes were closed. His eyes snapped open and he said, "There's a bunch of Pokémon coming this way!" Absol tensed up at this and growled, "It's a monster house!" No sooner had he said this, a bunch of Pokémon suddenly appeared in the room, surrounding them. They could see several Furret, a Nosepass, a Piloswine, a Lairon, a Snorunt, and a few Mightyena. Absol looked at the Pokémon and noticed something seemed to be wrong with them. "_Those eyes... That's not normal. What happened to these Pokémon?_" he thought. Then there was no time for thought as the Pokémon leapt at the two of them, forcing them to scatter.

When they failed to get Squirtle and Absol, the Pokémon split up to go after the two of them. Unfortunately for those Pokémon, Absol had been toughened up due to living near the Frosty Forest, so he knew a lot of moves and could hold his own in battle. He knocked all the Furret out with a single well-launched Razor Wind, the explosion sending them flying into the wall behind them. The Piloswine also came rushing at him for a Take Down, but Absol used Sucker Punch to make the first strike and knocked out the Piloswine. The Snorunt also tried to come after him and was hit by a Night Slash, which Absol charged up energy in the spike on his head and slashed the Snorunt with it, knocking it out instantly. Absol managed to catch his breath, then remembered Squirtle and tried to find him.

The rest of the Pokémon had taken off after Squirtle, forcing him down a narrow passage into a smaller room. Squirtle was able to make this work to his advantage, as with a well-placed Ice Beam, the whole floor of the small room became covered with ice. Since the Pokémon were still rapidly charging after him, they quickly lost their balance and went skidding into a wall. Squirtle used Withdraw to pull himself into his shell and then went into a Rapid Spin to bounce around the room like a pinball. This made it hard for his attackers to keep up with him, and he kept knocking them over with all his bouncing. While they were still down on the ground, Squirtle launched at Nosepass with an Aqua Tail attack, quickly knocking it out, then slid on his feet to Tackle one of the Mightyena. The rest of the Pokémon then got up and came charging at Squirtle, but he answered with a Hydro Pump, spinning in place just above the ground, blasting them all with a rotating stream of water. They couldn't take too much of this and were soon knocked out.

It was at this point that Absol arrived in the room. Having not found Squirtle in the bigger room, he followed the sounds coming from one of the tunnels and found Squirtle standing in the middle of the rest of the Pokemon, who were all knocked out. Absol was impressed with Squirtle's resourcefulness, and said that he now believed Squirtle might be able to handle the Frosty Forest, though he suggested that Squirtle train a little while longer while he went to look for Charmander and Chikorita.

Although Squirtle wanted to find them himself, he eventually agreed, so Absol left the cave while Squirtle continued to train.

A while later...

Squirtle exited the training ground, having a few scraps and cuts, but otherwise in good shape, having been toughened up by the Pokémon in the cave. He glanced around a bit, then heard someone approaching, which turned out to be Absol. "Hey, Absol! Did you find them?" Squirtle asked. "No. I could not locate them. But I only searched the main path, so either they were somewhere in the trees, or they've already moved on to Frosty Forest," Absol said. "Oh..." Squirtle said, disappointed. Absol quickly picked up on this and said, "Don't feel so down. Whether they're already at the forest or not, they couldn't have left the area yet. So you can still find them if you just keep looking." Squirtle felt better at this and thanked Absol for the words. "Now, climb on my back and I'll help you get back to the main path," Absol said. He then crouched down so that Squirtle could climb on. Squirtle quickly hopped on and made sure that he wouldn't fall before telling Absol he was ready. With that, Absol took off running into the trees.

Soon, they were standing next to some trees with the path that Squirtle had been on before in front of them. "Go this way to continue heading north," Absol said, pointing the direction to Squirtle. "Eventually, you'll see a Kangaskhan Rock, which will signal the entrance to the Frosty Forest. With the training you've done today and the supplies I put in your toolbox while you were knocked out, you should be able to handle yourself for a while, at least until you can find your friends. I'll keep looking too, but you need to keep moving if there really are Pokémon chasing after you." Squirtle nodded and thanked Absol for everything. "Don't worry about it. I couldn't live with myself if I passed up a Pokémon in distress," he said. He then began to move away, turning to look over his shoulder to say, "I hope you will be successful in your search for the truth, Squirtle. Be strong!" He then leapt into the trees on the other side of the path, leaving Squirtle alone.

"Absol sure is a nice guy. I hope whoever he's supposed to help comes along soon. It might just help clear up some of the rumors surrounding him," Squirtle said to himself. He then turned in the direction that Absol had pointed in and said to himself, "Well, I'm on my own, at least for now. But I have to stay strong if I'm going to find Charmander and Chikorita. I just hope that nothing happened to them after Faust attacked us..." He shook those thoughts out of his head, then began to walk down the path, heading far and away as he resumed his journey.

* * *

Some music I thought of:

A Frantic Search- Sub Zero Containment (Metroid Fusion)

Squirtle and Absol- Snow Refugees (PMD: Red/Blue Rescue Team)

Conversation in the Cave- Training Maze (PMD: Red/Blue Rescue Team)

Monster House- Marowak Dojo (PMD: EoT/EoD/EoS)

The Continuing Journey- So Much More... (Bentley Jones) (Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing)

18. Bonds of Friendship

Path to Frosty Forest

Charmander and Chikorita had been searching the trees along the path leading to the Frosty Forest for quite a while, and still they hadn't come across any trace of Squirtle. They were beginning to fear the worst had happened, when Charmander, through his runny nose, caught a very familiar scent.

"What is it, Charmander?" Chikorita asked, noticing that Charmander had stopped and seemed to be focused on something. "This sure smells familiar... That's it! It's Squirtle's scent! He was here recently!" Charmander exclaimed, overjoyed to know this. "Really? When?" Chikorita cried, also extremely happy at this news. "*sniff* It's still fresh... This must've just been a little while ago, and it leads to the Frosty Forest!" Charmander said. "That's great! Maybe we can catch up to him if we hurry!" Chikorita exclaimed, her high spirits having returned to her. They both began to run along the path, aiming for the forest that was in the distance.

Close to the Frosty Forest

As Charmander and Chikorita were hurrying up the path, a ways up the path was Squirtle. He was busy crunching an apple, having not eaten since he had woken up a while ago. "Mmm... With all the extra supplies Absol gave me, Charmander, Chikorita, and I shouldn't have trouble along the way. And it can help me too while I'm searching for them, since Absol said there's no telling where they could be right now," Squirtle said to himself, finishing up the apple. He then rubbed his hands together to create some warmth, saying, "I sure hope that they're okay out here. If I don't like this cold, I can only imagine how much they don't like it!" As he breathed into his hands, something caught his eye and he looked up to see what it was. "Wow!" Squirtle said, amazed at the sight in front of him. The trees in front of him were frozen, but they were covered in snow, making it look like the trees had a fine dusting of snow on them. Squirtle then snapped back to himself, noticing the nearby Kangaskhan Rock, indicating this was the entrance to Frosty Forest. "It sure is pretty, but that forest is probably going to be crawling with lots of tough Pokemon..." Squirtle said to himself. He walked up to the Kangaskhan Rock and deposited a few of the extra items that he didn't need. With some weight taken out, the toolbox was a bit more comfortable to wear. "OK. Charmander and Chikorita could be in there right now, dealing with the Pokemon and cold. There's no easy way to get around this, and they know that hiding out here isn't the answer to our problem. I have to find them, since they're out here because of me. Just gotta stay strong, just like Absol said, and find them," Squirtle told himself.

With enough supplies to help him if he ran into any problems, Squirtle left the Kangaskhan Rock and proceeded into the Frosty Forest.

As he began to make his way into the trees, someone could sense that he was there. "_...Someone has intruded upon the forest... The enfeebled flow of icy winds... Is this intruder to blame for it? They must be stopped. For it is to protect the forest..._"

Later, at the entrance to Frosty Forest

After walking the long distance to the Frosty Forest, Charmander and Chikorita finally stood in front of the trees and Kangaskhan Rock that signaled the entrance. The whole way, they had tracked Squirtle's scent in order to make sure that they were going the right way, which had led them here.

"This must be the Frosty Forest that Weavile told us about," Charmander said, checking his bag to make sure he had enough supplies while Chikorita had done the same a little ways back. "The way the snow sits on those frozen branches sure is pretty. I wonder if Squirtle thought that too," Chikorita said to herself, remembering that Squirtle always thought his Bubble attack was pretty. "Yeah, but there's bound to be tough Pokemon living in there. I hope he'll be alright until we can catch up to him," Charmander said, going to the Kangaskhan Rock to pick a few things out of storage. As he went through the things they had stored up, a confused look came over his face. "Hey, Chikorita did you anything on the ground at all while we were walking here?" he asked. "No, why?" Chikorita asked. "Hmm... I wonder where Squirtle got all these extra items, then," Charmander said. "Let's not worry about that right now. For now, let's get in there and see if we can find him!" Chikorita said. Charmander nodded, and they passed between the trees, hoping that if they followed Squirtle's scent, it would lead them to him.

The Frosty Clearing

Squirtle walked into the clearing, feeling a little bit winded after his trek through all the trees and figuring out where he was going. Dealing with the cold in the forest wasn't bad, but finding out which way he was supposed to go was the tricky part. With all the snow falling, it became hard to figure out when he was passing through an area he already went through. Thanks to the training he had gone through on the Snow Path and in Absol's training ground, he was easily able to handle the Pokemon that were living in the forest. He had run into a few Lairon, dealt with the speediness of some Furret and later a pack of Mightyena, had to outsmart himself when he encountered a Ditto, and made it past some Piloswine and Azurill. Now that he made it to this clearing, he could take a quick stop and try to warm up a bit.

"Boy, this sure is a good workout, but I still haven't found any trace of Charmander or Chikorita yet. I wonder where they are?" Squirtle said to himself, doing a few aerobics in order to keep moving and stay warm. "I hope they aren't too far ahead of here. I'm really worried about them. Right, then. No time to rest, I've got to keep moving." And with that, he

picked up the toolbox, which he had set down when he started his stretching, and proceeded into the Frosty Grotto.

As Squirtle proceeded through the grotto, he occasionally came across a Rhyhorn or a Metang, but for the most part, there were fewer Pokemon living down in the grotto. Unfortunately, the snow kept coming down into the grotto, making it colder than out in the forest, but at least finding the right way to go was easier here. Soon, Squirtle came across a slope going up, and climbed it, curious of what was up at the top.

Once he got up there, he could see that there was a path just at the bottom of the hill that he was standing on. From the look of things, it would continue moving to the north. Glancing around, Squirtle said, "It sure was a bit of a hike to get through this forest, but I think I'm close to the end. I just need to get to the bottom of this hill and I should be out. It's not much further." He then began to walk again, but stopped when he thought he heard someone talking. He listened closely, wondering whether he imagined it, when he heard it again and it sounded a bit clearer. "...Turn back. You may not go beyond here..." Squirtle glanced around, searching for the owner of the feminine voice, then asked, "Who's there?" The owner of the voice said, "You are forbidden to pass... If you insist on proceeding... Then so be it... But only if you can defeat me!" Suddenly, a slight wind blew past Squirtle, and a light reflected off of the ice, forcing Squirtle to cover his eyes due to the brightness. Suddenly the light faded with a loud, "Gyaaaaaaaaaah!" When Squirtle opened his eyes, he saw a blue-feathered bird with a white-feathered chest flapping its wings just above him. "I am Articuno! The warder of ice!" it said, making it known that Articuno was the owner of the voice he heard. She came to a landing, then said, "I shall destroy those who enter the forest with all my might! Let us begin!" And with that, Articuno spread her wings, and the battle began!

Articuno came flying at Squirtle, aiming to hit him with a Peck attack, but Squirtle used Withdraw, and the attack simply knocked him away. When he came close to the ground, Squirtle went into a Hydro Pump attack, using the water to stay just above the ground while trying to hit Articuno. Articuno dodged most of this, though she did get hit a few times. Soon, Squirtle stopped unleashing Hydro Pump due to Articuno's Pressure ability forcing him to use more energy then he normally would. Once it ended, Articuno managed to clip Squirtle with a Wing Attack. "You're pretty good for one so small. But you'll have to do better than that if you want to get past me!" Articuno stated, flapping her wings to stay in place. She then came at him with another Peck attack, and Squirtle responded with a Skull Bash attack, managing to overpower the Peck and push Articuno back. "You're strong too, Articuno. But I'm not going to lose!" Squirtle said after landing. After recovering, Articuno prepared herself to attack again.

A short while later, just past the Frosty Clearing

Charmander and Chikorita had been steadily working their way into the Frosty Forest, having encountered Pokemon that Squirtle had run into, all the while trying to track him by his scent. When they reached the Frosty Clearing, they stopped to take a quick rest to make sure they were

prepared for anything that awaited them in the grotto up ahead. As they began to make their way into the Frosty Grotto, they could suddenly hear the sound of a battle coming from up ahead.

"You hear that, Chikorita? It sounds like it's coming from that hill up ahead," Charmander said. "We'd better hurry. Squirtle could be up there!" she replied, and they both navigated their way through the trees to get to the hill. Once they got there, they quickly climbed up, and were shocked by the sight that awaited them. Squirtle was crouched on one knee, panting a bit, while past him on his right was Articuno, who looked to be in worse shape than he was.

"Squirtle!" they both called out to him, and he quickly turned to where the voices were coming from to see his friends there. "Charmander! Chikorita!" Squirtle exclaimed, glad to see them. "So you have friends, do you? Are they also intruders!" Articuno demanded. "What are you talking about? We're trying to get through the forest, no matter what," Chikorita explained. Articuno raised herself up, standing tall with her wings above her. "No! I cannot allow any of you to pass!" she said. "You keep saying that, but you haven't said why," Squirtle said, also standing up. Articuno set her wings at her side and explained, "The frigid forest's air… It has warmed considerably in recent times." Charmander listened to this and thought, "_Warmed up? I'm still freezing, but…_" Articuno continued, "The flow of frigid air has been disturbed in the forest. Snow has started to melt. Snow is melting, which has never occurred before. Never, not even once. Then he appeared in the forest," she gestured to Squirtle, "followed by you two just now." She raised her wings again and shouted, "Is this not your doing?" Charmander yelled, "We don't have anything to do with that! It's a coincidence! Articuno, please listen. It's not our fault that the snow here has started to melt. Natural disasters are happening all over the world right now. Even if we hadn't come, the forest's frigid airflow would have been disturbed." Articuno looked at him skeptically and said, "Is that all? I'm supposed to believe that?" She flapped her wings, hovering over the spot she was standing on and said, "I've had enough of your foolish talk! You will all meet your end here! Blizzard!" she shouted, sending an icy wind with small snowballs out of her mouth at Team Go-Getters.

The wind caused a wall of ice to rise in front of Charmander and Chikorita, preventing them from getting to Squirtle, while Squirtle, weakened by the battle, fell back on his knee and began to greatly feel the effects of the wind. "Shoot… I can't… Take it much more…" he groaned, feeling a layer of ice begin to form around his feet and begin to spread up to his torso. "What are you doing? Stop it!" Charmander cried, tears beginning to form in his and Chikorita's eyes as they could see Squirtle beginning to freeze. Articuno paid their pleas no mind, and stopped the Blizzard attack to begin charging an Ice Beam. "This is it!" she said, and sent the Ice Beam towards Squirtle, intending to make sure he had no chance of getting out of the ice.

Suddenly, a flash of light appeared, and an attack hit the middle of the Ice Beam, breaking it and preventing the attack from hitting Squirtle. "Razor Wind?" Articuno exclaimed in surprise. Squirtle looked in the direction it had come from and instantly spotted a familiar figure.

"Absol!" he exclaimed, as the Dark-type leapt from his perch to the hilltop, landing right next to Squirtle. He then used his claws to break the layer of ice that had gathered up to Squirtle's chest. "Are you okay, Squirtle?" he asked, concerned. Squirtle dropped to his hand and knees, shivering violently, but said, "Yeah, I'll be fine."

Articuno landed, looked at Absol and asked, "Why do you stop me, Absol? Why are you protecting them?" Absol looked at Squirtle and said, "I couldn't just leave him alone, even if his friends were with him. You have falsely accused them, Articuno, and I know what that feels like." Articuno was confused by this, so Absol said, "There is nothing false in their words. There are many calamities happening throughout the world. I can sense them, wherever they may occur. These calamities are of a special nature, the likes of which I've never experienced before." Articuno considered what Absol had said, then dropped her wings at her sides. "Very well. I will choose to believe you. I will let you pass, if you promise to stop the calamities. I'm counting on you!" Squirtle nodded and said, "We will! I promise!" With that said, Articuno spread her wings and took to the skies.

Charmander used his Metal Claw to shatter the ice in front of him and Chikorita, and they both rushed over to Squirtle, who was still shivering a bit. They knocked him over, overjoyed that they had found him in one piece. Squirtle also learned at this point that Chikorita knew how to use Vine Whip, since she had never used it before now. The reunion lasted a few minutes, while Absol just watched them, glad to know Articuno now trusted them.

When they finally piled off of Squirtle, Charmander turned to Absol and said, "Thank you, Absol, for helping us convince Articuno of what's going on." Absol looked at him quietly for a moment, then said, "Instead of thanking me, your time would be better spent on finding a solution to the calamities. If they are not stopped, worse will befall us… My instinct warns me so." Everyone was a bit surprised at how Absol had seemingly changed his attitude so quickly. Absol continued, "I can sense that there may be a powerful force somewhere in the world, bringing these disasters down upon us. I was led here by my feelings of foreboding…" He then looked away, looking to the northeast and predicted how far it would be to reach the area he was thinking of. He then said, "It would be best if we stuck together from here on out. I will join you." Everyone was further surprised by this, and Squirtle asked, "But Absol, didn't you say you were waiting here to escort someone?" Absol turned to him and said, "Correct. What I was asked to do was escort one who came through here, seeking the truth. That is you, Squirtle. Given where you will be going, it will be vital that you have someone who knows the area up ahead, as it will help put a stop to the calamities. Please, let me lend your team my powers." Team Go-Getters was happy to accept Absol's help, and they slid down the hill to the path that would lead them further north, where the conditions would become harsher the further they went.

As they began to walk away from the Frosty Forest, Absol stopped to take one last look at it, turned to consider a moment, then began to walk again, catching up with Team Go-Getters, who stopped to wait for him. As he walked beside Squirtle, Charmander, and Chikorita, he thought to

himself, "_I can sense it, the aura within Squirtle. Perhaps he is the one that will bring an end to the disasters. But no matter. He is my friend, and I will protect him from here on, no matter what we may face._" With these thoughts, he continued walking, as they left the Frosty Forest behind.

* * *

Music:

Catching up with Squritle- Open Ocean (Ecco the Dolphin (Genesis Version))

In the Frosty Forest- Frosty Forest (PMD: Red/Blue Rescue Team), Hailfire Peaks-Icy Side (Banjo-Tooie)

Squirtle vs. Articuno- Freeze! (Paper Mario)

Sounds of Battle- Kushi's Ride (Okami)

Saved by Absol- Hidden Palace Zone (Sonic the Hedgehog 2)

Moving on- You're Not Alone! (Final Fantasy IX)

19. Premonition

Northeast of the Frosty Forest

Squirtle, Charmander, Chikorita, and Absol had been on the road for about a day and a half after leaving the Frosty Forest behind. Most of that time had been devoted to crossing the icy mountain trail just past the forest, and they still had a ways of hiking to do before they would reach the other side.

"_This icy mountain path seems to go on forever..._" Squirtle thought to himself, thinking about the fact that almost two days had passed since they left the Frosty Forest. "_We've been walking for a long time... Charmander, Chikorita... Even Absol is starting to look a bit tired... We've been running this way because we don't have any other idea about where to go... But are we really going the right way? Is there anything in store for us up ahead?"_ He pushed these thoughts out of his head, brushing over his hair, which lay flat against his head except for the ends, which were spiked. His hair covered the back of his head and the front stuck out a bit over his head.

"Brr... It's too cold out here! We've seen nothing but snow for so long, and the scenery hasn't changed much at all lately... Are we getting anywhere anymore?" Charmander groaned, as he really wasn't a fan of cold weather. "What do you expect, coming out this far to the north? That the weather is going to start out bad and then get better?" Absol said, annoyed at Charmander for stating what they were all already thinking. "Hey, relax. I'm just saying," Charmander said, not trying to anger Absol. "Well, you should have seen that we would have to cross a

mountain. You do have a Wonder Map, don't you?" Absol said, stopping to look at Charmander. "The map doesn't display everything. We crossed a swamp just before Frost Village, and that wasn't on it," Charmander retorted, stopping as well. "Well, isn't that convenient? You travel out all this way, using a map that somebody must've fallen asleep while drawing since it isn't finished," Absol growled. The two were beginning to inch closer to each other, looking like they were going to start brawling any second now, so Chikorita stepped in. "Hey, guys, knock it off. We're not going to make any progress just standing around arguing, and it's not going to be good for us to stand in the middle of a blizzard anyway," she said, waving the leaf on her head slightly, making sure it brushed close to their noses. With a small sniff, both Charmander and Absol instantly forgot that they had been getting angry at each other.

"How did that happen?" Charmander wondered. "I know. It's because the leaf on Chikorita's head gives off a calming, healing odor, right?" Squirtle said. Chikorita nodded, and said, "It's not as strong as some others, but it works when it's needed." Feeling much better after sniffing Chikorita leaf, Charmander said, "Sorry, Absol. I'll be sure to watch what say, alright?" Absol said, "That's okay. This cold can just make anybody short-tempered under the right conditions. Don't worry about it." With that said and done, the flu-less foursome continued on their way.

Later on...

Team Go-Getters continued their way across the frozen mountain, being sure to watch out for any weak spots in the rock, as well as patches of ice. Suddenly, Chikorita asked, "...Hey, guys? I was just thinking... This place is really empty. The only ones that seem to be around here are the four of us. Do you think so too?" Squirtle and Charmander thought about this while they walked, while Absol just stayed focused on the path, knowing that there were more Pokemon out this way. After a moment, both replied that they weren't sure and asked why she thought that. "I just have this feeling that there's nothing ahead of here, even if we keep moving... And I don't know how much longer we can keep going on like this..."

Squirtle instantly guessed the reason why she was saying this and said, "You're worried about what's going to happen from here on out, aren't you?" She nodded, and Squirtle said, "Hey, why are you worrying about that now? We've had to face plenty of other things where it looked bleak for us, and we've managed to make it out here, even after all that. Don't worry, we're going to be fine!" The whole group stopped as Chikorita looked at him a moment, then she said, "Yeah. You're right." Squirtle asked, "Is it that much of a shock when I do things right?" She shook her head and said, "No. It's just that there isn't any point in wondering about what might happen, especially after coming this far." Charmander walked up to them and said, "Yeah. There's no reason to worry now. We came out here because we have faith in you, Squirtle. And that's not going to change anytime soon. We still trust you, Squirtle..." Absol watched on, smiling slightly that Squirtle had such understanding friends. He then removed the smile and said, "So, shall we keep moving, wherever we may have to go?" The three agreed, then began to walk again.

As he walked, Squirtle thought, "_Yes... There's no doubt in their minds. All of them really trust me. I just have to make sure I believe myself more and not be indecisive. Just like when..._" Suddenly, Squirtle stopped walking, looking as if he was fixated on something. The others quickly noted this and looked back at him. "Is something the matter?" Absol asked. His words didn't register in Squirtle's head as something was happening to him at the moment...

**Flashback...**

"The Roar of Time...When Dialga uses its Roar of Time, there is a moment where it comes to a complete stop, unable to defend itself. This moment may be just long enough to put a stop to the battle. I have no idea whether this idea will work or not, but it may be worth taking the risk. Are you willing to go through with it?" a man with cold-looking eyes, a futuristic-looking outfit, and spiky blue hair said to Squirtle, who was in his human form.

"You know it!" Squirtle responded, then suddenly dashed away from the group towards a void that was slowly beginning to expand. Charging into the heart of the void, he lands on the back of a pink dragon that has what appears to be a pearl in each of its shoulders. As he grabs onto its back, the space suddenly begins to distort as the dragon begins to warp space, disappearing with Squirtle on its back...

**End flashback...**

As the vision came to an end, Squirtle suddenly began to experience a massive migraine as more images began to flash through his mind. "Squirtle? Are you okay?!" Charmander called, but Squirtle could only vaguely hear him. As his headache began to get worse, he started to shake, dropping to his knees and sweating profusely. "Squirtle, say something! What's going on?!" Chikorita cried. Squirtle continued to shake in place as his headache became worse and worse. He had experienced moments where he could see images, but they were never like this. Finally, he couldn't take it anymore and, clutching his head with his hands, he screamed, "AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!" His scream shook his friends hard; they had never heard Squirtle scream like this before. He kept screaming for several seconds, then slumped over on his side in the snow, eyes shut.

Charmander, Chikorita, and Absol dashed over to him in a panic. Absol quickly checked him over, then breathed a sigh of relief. "He's fine. Right now, he's just asleep from coming down from whatever that was," he said. Charmander and Chikorita were also relieved to hear this and calmed down a bit. Then Charmander said, "But we can't leave him out here. He'll freeze if he stays out here." Absol hunched over and put Squirtle on his back, then said, "I know where there's a cave. It's near the base of this mountain, which we aren't far from at this point. Let's get him there quickly." With that, they took off, following the winding mountain path.

Sooner than expected, they came across a slope leading down. Rushing down it, Absol led the way to the cave, Charmander and Chikorita right on his heels. Soon, they stood in front of the opening in the rock face and

hurried inside. Inside, they found the remains of a straw bed that Absol had made when he had come out this way. Quickly reassembling it, they laid Squirtle down on it. Absol then headed for the cave entrance, saying that he would be back with some firewood. Charmander and Chikorita decided to stay and watch over Squirtle.

Later...

"Ugh..." Squirtle groaned as he began to wake up. He sat up, rubbing his eyes as if he had slept for some time. Suddenly, he heard Charmander and Chikorita talking and turned to see them standing next to a fire talking to Absol. As he looked over at them, they suddenly turned towards him and realized he was awake. "Uh, hey guys. Um, where are we?" he asked. Charmander looked at him funny and said, "'Where are we?' That's the first thing you say when you wake up?" Chikorita looked at him angrily and said, "You scared us half to death! What happened back there?" Squirtle looked at her confused and said, "Huh? What are you talking about?" Absol said, "Back up there on the mountain, you started acting weird and then just started screaming before passing out. Remember?" Squirtle looked surprised and said, "I passed out?" Charmander asked, "You don't remember that?" Squirtle shook his head and said, "Last thing I remember was walking along the mountain path, then waking up in this cave. I don't remember screaming or anything like that." Absol then said, "Well, whatever it was, you seem to be fine now. I looked you over while you were asleep and, other than being exhausted, you were fine, physically and otherwise." Squirtle sighed in relief, grateful that he was fine after whatever had happened.

Chikorita came forward with a bowl of water and said, "Sorry I yelled at you Squirtle. Here, you'd better drink something. It'll help you feel better." Squirtle graciously accepted the water and drank it all down. "We'll stay here until you've fully recovered your strength," Absol said. Everyone agreed to this, so they all got comfortable in the cave. Later, Charmander and Chikorita left to go get firewood and any supplies they could find, while Absol stood guard at the cave entrance. While they were out, Squirtle suddenly began to sense another presence in the cave. He looked around nervously, not sure who was there.

Suddenly, he heard a familiar voice. "_...Finally. Finally, you have arrived..._" Squirtle looked around for the source of the voice. As he looked in the back of the cave, he spotted the owner of the voice. "I've been waiting for you," she said. Squirtle instantly recognized the owner as Gardevoir. "I am so glad. Finally, we get to meet in person," she said. He looked at her attentively, as she began to speak again. "A little farther ahead, there is a mountain known as Mt. Freeze. Inside the cave at its peak... That's where Ninetales lives," Gardevoir explained. Squirtle was shocked at this revelation. "Ninetales is anxiously awaiting your arrival. Beware..." Gardevoir said, then started to fade away. "Oh! W-wait!" Squirtle said, but stopped as she faded from sight completely. It was at this point that the others came back and found Squirtle seemingly talking to no one.

After they stoked the fire, Squirtle explained what had just happened. "I see. So that's what happened while we were gone," Absol said. "So

Gardevoir appeared to you in person?" Charmander asked. "Yeah. And she said that Ninetales lives on Mt. Freeze, which is just ahead of us," Squirtle added. "I always thought something had to be living up there on that mountain," Absol murmured to himself. "That's amazing. Ninetales isn't just a legend. It really does exist, and at Mt. Freeze's peak," Chikorita said. "Finally, it's all coming together now. All the work we put into getting here is truly going to be worth it. We'll meet with Ninetales and get the truth, which will clear up the suspicions others have about you Squirtle!" Charmander exclaimed. "Well, we still have to get up there though," Squirtle said, trying to make it sound like that's what he was concerned about. But Chikorita saw through it and said, "Listen, Squirtle, there's no need to worry. Everything's going to turn out all right in the end. Of course it's going to be a bit intimidating to meet Ninetales. And I can understand how you might think that you could be the heartless human who abandoned Gardevoir. But that can't be. We know that you can't be that human." Squirtle looked at them and asked, "You believe in me that much?" Charmander and Chikorita looked at each other, then Charmander said, "Well, there might've been a time when we had some doubts... But looking back, I don't see why. The point is, you're a good person, Squirtle. Back when I met you in the Tiny Woods... Other than the way you were acting, when I think about it, there was something different about you. Strange, isn't it?" he grinned. Chikorita then said, "Anyway, we'll learn the truth when we get to the peak of Mt. Freeze. Do you feel well enough to travel now?" Squirtle stood up and tested a few movements, then said, "Yeah, I think I'll be fine." Although they would've preferred if Squirtle would rest and make sure he was back to full strength, this news was too big to just wait on, so they accepted this, grabbed their bags, and left the cave to continue on the path to Mt. Freeze.

As they ran along the path, Squirtle thought to himself, "_Been a long road to follow... But this chance to learn the truth has been calling. We'll find out the truth and deal with it together, just like we always do."_

* * *

Music:

Travelling Through a Blizzard- Snow Refugees (PMD: Red/Blue Rescue Team)

Rush of Memories- Organization XIII (Kingdom Hearts II)

Gardevoir's Visit- The Nine-Tailed Legend (PMD: Red/Blue Rescue Team)

Onward to the Truth- Gravity (Wolf's Rain)

20. Ninetales Speaks

Mt. Freeze: Base

Following Squirtle's conversation with Gardevoir, Team Go-Getters continued to head north, aiming for Mt. Freeze. They had to stop in

another cave for the night to make sure they were at full strength as well as to get out of the cold, but they were back on the road early next morning, and now they were standing on the cold rocks, looking up at Mt. Freeze.

"So this is Mt. Freeze..." Squirtle mused to himself. "Right. I've been here a few times myself, but I've never had any reason to climb up all the way to the peak, so I don't what's up there," Absol explained. Charmander walked over and said, "Well, I'm done getting the supplies I need for my bag out of storage, so I think we're ready to get going." Chikorita replied, "OK! Let's go then! Let's do our best to reach the peak!" With that, the four members of Team Go-Getters walked into the nearby opening in the mountainside, signaling the entrance to Mt. Freeze.

As the team wandered through the mountain caves looking for the stairs that would take them closer to the peak, they passed walls that were covered with ice, as well as pools that seemed to be full of frozen water. They also saw various Pokemon as they worked their way up the mountain, as they walked into a room full of ready-to-explode Pineco, were charged by several Pupitar that seemed eager to pick a fight, and a Shelgon who was looking to gain enough experience to level up and finally get his wings. They also met some nicer Pokemon on the way, such as a Swablu who was searching for food in the caves and pointed them in the right direction. They also met a Seel who gave them a fair warning about the snow that they would be seeing soon.

Soon after meeting the Seel, they reached the upper part of the mountain, where they were bombarded by snowstorm due to being outside and high up. As they climbed the slopes, more Pokemon came to attack them, such as a trio of Zangoose, an overactive Vigoroth itching to test his might, a Seviper trying to find food this high on the mountain, and a Slaking that served as an effective roadblock when they were getting close to a cave where they could rest. Working together, they were able to overcome the Slaking and continue on their quest.

After a little more walking, they arrived at the cave that was a halfway point, according to Absol. Since they saw a Kangaskhan Rock, they decided to take the opportunity to take a rest since they were all winded from the weather and climbing so high. Mt. Freeze was taller than any mountain they had climbed previously.

"Whew... This sure has been a good workout," Squirtle sighed. "Yeah, it sure has been. Between the snow and the Pokemon that live here, Mt. Freeze sure is one rough place," Charmander agreed. "Well, that's why you've all had training, correct? So it won't be impossible for you to handle?" Absol asked. "Yeah, that's right. It's just rougher to fight where there's less oxygen and it continuously gets colder as we go. We just haven't had to deal with that until now, since Frosty Forest got warmer and Mt. Blaze and Mt. Thunder weren't this tall," Chikorita said, laying next to Squirtle. "Hey, Chikorita?" Squirtle asked, and she looked at him. "Why were you constantly pressed up against me most of the time we were climbing? Not that it was a problem or anything, but it was a bit unusual for you." Chikorita turned away so that Squirtle wouldn't see her blushing and said, "Uh... I was... Cold. Yeah. And I pressed up against

you because I wanted to be a bit warmer. Since your body is naturally warm." This confused Squirtle, who said, "But Charmander is much warmer. Wouldn't it have been better to press up against him?" Chikorita said, "Well, yes, but you were closer." Squirtle shrugged and said, "Well, okay then." While Charmander thought the same as Squirtle, Absol knew that Squirtle didn't exactly get the point. They rested for a few more minutes, as it was warmer in the clearing, then picked up their supplies and headed back out onto the slopes to continue their climb.

They stepped back out into the cold air, noting that the peak wasn't too far from where they were. It was just a simple matter of following the winding path and being ready for any Pokemon that might attack them. This part of the mountain was very similar to the cave on the lower part; they saw small puddles of frozen water as they walked, and the walls and parts of the ground were covered with a thick layer of ice. There weren't many Pokemon on this part of the mountain, due to the air being very cold. They only occasionally saw a Glalie as they made their way up now.

Soon, the winding pathway came to an end, and they found themselves looking at another opening, which led into a cave within the jutting mountain peak. They looked at the opening for a moment, then walked inside. After a bit of walking, they arrived in what seemed to be a room. It appeared to be small, as they saw rocks were surrounding them on all sides except for the way they had entered. There seemed to be ledges higher up in the room, but they seemed to be out of Team Go-Getters' reach.

"We've finally made it. This is Mt. Freeze's summit," Charmander said. "It looks like the summit at least, but I wonder where Ninetales is?" Chikorita wondered. "Maybe Ninetales lives somewhere up there?" Squirtle suggested, looking at the ledges. Absol looked too, but then flinched as he felt a presence coming up from behind them.

"There they are! Squirtle's over there!" a familiar voice shouted. At the sound of it, all four members of Team Go-Getters whirled around to see three shadows coming towards them. "All right! I see them now!" another familiar voice said. Soon, the shadows entered the room, and Team Go-Getters' suspicions were confirmed; it was Team ACT! "It's about time. We finally caught up to you. Your running dragged us all the way out here..." Tyranitar growled, impressed that they could run so far. "That's enough, Tyranitar. We can finally settle things and see how tough they really are here. I can barely contain myself. I've been waiting for his moment for a long time," Charizard said. He then looked at Charmander and said, "Brother. Don't take this the wrong way, but I hate to take it easy in a battle. It's your fault if you get badly hurt now." Alakazam looked at Squirtle and said, "Squirtle... I truly did not want this to happen... But your time has run out. The role of a Rescue Team is to help bring peace. So we... Will crush with you every shred of our power! Get them!"

Everyone prepared themselves, then the two teams rushed towards each other. Both sides hit with strong physical attacks, sending both team's members flying in different directions. Absol and Charizard landed close to each other, Chikorita and Charmander went head-to-head with Tyranitar, and Squirtle and Alakazam squared off.

Absol leapt out of the way of Charizard's Slash attack, just narrowly missing his claws. As he landed, Absol began to charge energy into his horn as Charizard righted himself. He then launched a Flamethrower at Absol, who responded with a Razor Wind flurry, cutting through the Flamethrower and leaving him undamaged. Charizard then responded with a Fire Fang while Absol came flying at him with a Night Slash, striking with equal power, pushing them both away from each other.

Elsewhere in the room, Charmander and Chikorita were working together to stop Tyranitar. Tyranitar's attack pattern left little room for error, as he was making sure to use his attacks when they were most vulnerable. He sent a Rock Slide towards Charmander when he was back up against the wall, and then sent a Blizzard towards Chikorita that froze her legs to the ground. Fortunately, Charmander was able to use Metal Claw to cut through the rocks falling towards him just enough to get out without suffering damage, then used an Ember attack to defrost Chikorita's legs. He then attacked Tyranitar with a Fire Spin, restricting his movements, while Chikorita shot a Solarbeam she'd been charging while she was frozen. The two attacks left Tyranitar off balance, but he wasn't beat yet.

Finally, Squirtle and Alakazam were exchanging blows to each other. Alakazam had more power behind his Psychic attacks, but Squirtle had more resourcefulness. Due to this, they were mostly even and kept switching from one Special Attack to another in an attempt to overpower each other. When their Special Attacks were exhausted, they switched to regular Attacks. Squirtle learned at this point that while Alakazam usually didn't fight physically, he still knew some good physical attacks in case the opportunity ever arose. Still, the two were about even in their battle.

The battling continued much this way for a while, until everyone was pushed back onto opposite sides by their physical attacks. Team Go-Getters on one side, Team ACT on the other. Together, the two teams went flying towards each other for a team blast, when...

"Cease this at once!" a voice suddenly called out. It caught everyone's attention, as both teams suddenly stopped in midair, looking for the source of the voice. Suddenly, the owner of the voice landed and used a powerful force to push both teams away from each other. It was enough to lift them off their feet, so they all hit the ground somewhat hard. After landing on his stomach, Squirtle looked up to see who it was and saw a fox covered with shimmering yellow fur (except for the ends of its tails, which were a reddish-orange). It was four-legged, had a tuft of fur on the back of its head stretching over its neck, a white scarf wrapped around its neck that was hanging down to its chest, and what appeared to be a scar on the rear left leg. One word entered both Squirtle and Alakazam's minds...

"Ninetales!"

This one word left everyone shocked. "W-what?! Ninetales?!" Charizard exclaimed. "Th-that's Ninetales..." Charmander said, awed. "Gardevoir was

right..." Chikorita whispered. "The legend... It was real..." Tyranitar muttered. Absol gazed ahead at Ninetales, waiting to see what would transpire now. Ninetales stood up straight, and turned to Alakazam. "Cease this useless fighting at once, Alakazam," Ninetales said, and it was apparent that Ninetales was female. She looked over at Team Go-Getters and said, "They are... My guests." She then turned back to Alakazam and said, "And you can feel that, can't you? That energy he exudes? You most of all those here should realize... How powerful Hareta is."

Everyone seemed to get confused when Ninetales said that name. Who was Hareta? They all didn't know who she was talking about. Except for Squirtle. When she said that name, he looked almost like he was in a trance, as something came to him...

**Flashback**

"Kaisei. Are you sure you want to do this? To leave him here with me?" a middle-aged man with white hair and a white mustache wearing a brown jacket over his work clothes asked a man wearing a black vest over his white shirt, blue jeans, brown shoes, and black hair long enough to be tied back into a ponytail. "Absolutely. What I know about the Distortion World... If anyone were to find that out, I'd be hunted down, along with anyone close to me. That includes my wife and my son. They didn't do anything, so they shouldn't have to be forced to go through that. But I promise, Professor Rowan, I will be back someday. And when that day comes, I just hope Hareta will be willing to accept me as his father," Kaisei said. "You shouldn't have to worry. He'll come to know that you're his father when he sees you. I'm sure of it," Professor Rowan said. Kaisei smiled and said, "Thanks, old friend. I guess it's time for me to go now." He then bent over to the little child in Professor Rowan's arms, kissed the sleeping boy's forehead, and whispered, "Take care, Hareta. I'm doing this so you will be safe. But I swear I'll be back."

With that said, Kaisei stood up and began to run off, wanting to get far away from Sandgem Town as he knew from recent events that someone was out to get him and didn't want them to know the whereabouts of his son.

**End flashback**

Hareta. That was his name. He could never recall it before, but now that he had heard it, it was as if he had never forgotten it. "That's... My name..." he whispered. Ninetales heard what he said and smiled warmly, turning and nodding at him. When they saw that nod, everyone realized who she was referring to.

Alakazam stepped forward and said, "Tell us, Ninetales!" She turned back to him and he continued, "Who was the human that appeared in your legend? No, was the legend itself an actual event? Depending on your response, I may have no choice but to eliminate them!" Ninetales looked at him a moment, then said, "Whether my curse is considered a legend or not, I don't care. Regardless, it did happen. Many years ago, I attempted to lay a curse on a human for grabbing one of my tails. It was then, however, that Gardevoir, the human's partner, dashed in... She selflessly bore the

full brunt of the curse meant for the human. Then the human did a selfish and cowardly thing. They abandoned Gardevoir and fled. That human eventually became a Pokemon, who is alive to this day." Alakazam said, "Let's hear the truth. Who is that human?"

Ninetales turned to Squirtle/Hareta and said, "Hareta... You have no reason to fear. It is not you." Charmander could hardly believe what he just heard, so he said, "Just now... What did you say?" She looked over at Charmander and Chikorita and told them, "Hareta is not the human who is spoken of in the legend. That is what I said." Alakazam could hardly believe it either, but he kept it to himself. Charmander looked like he was on the verge of all-out bawling, while Chikorita began to shake all over. "_What's happening to me...? I'm so tensed up all of a sudden..._" they both thought. They managed to solve the problem by taking a few deep breaths. This removed the tension, then they just burst with joy, dashing over to Squirtle/Hareta and knocking him from his stomach onto his back. Both Absol and Ninetales smiled as they watched this display of friendship and love. After they calmed down, Ninetales turned to Team ACT and said, "I have something else to say. It is true that I foretold the world's balance becoming unstable... But I never said that the human becoming a Pokemon was the reason for it. The cause of the natural calamities... It exists elsewhere."

Charmander turned from Hareta to glare at Team ACT and said, "Hey, you hear that?! You were wrong! It was wrong to hound and harass Squirt- er, Hareta!" Alakazam got a bit nervous and said, "Yes. We apologize..." Tyranitar added, "We're sorry. We tried to help you, but ended up falling for Gengar's treachery in the end." Charizard forced himself to grin and said, "Not me. I never believed a word of it. Squ- no, Hareta isn't the treacherous type after all! Heh heh..." Everyone sweat dropped at this, Charmander knowing his older brother doesn't like to openly admit that he was wrong, especially in front of him. "Huh. If only that were true..." he commented. "But I must say... You are to be commended for prevailing through this cruel journey to discover the truth. Truly, an excellent job... Hareta," Alakazam said, making sure to get it right the first time. Everyone giggled at the fact that they were going to have to get to calling him by his real name. Suddenly, Charmander said, "Wait. Why did Hareta become a Pokemon then? He's not the human from the legend, but he still became a Pokemon. Who are you really, Hareta?"

Before Hareta could say anything, a quake suddenly struck the mountain! "Wah! An earthquake!" Hareta exclaimed. "Another disaster?!" Charizard shouted. "The world's crust is shifting. The natural calamities are getting worse. And... The shifting of the ground... It means someone is attempting to awaken the beast that embodies the ground... The beast that has slept deep underground... The Legendary Pokemon, Groudon!" Ninetales explained. "Someone is trying to awaken Groudon?!" Alakazam exclaimed, and Ninetales nodded. "What's that? Who's Groudon?" Chikorita asked. "I've heard of it. Isn't it one of the Pokemon spoken of in myths?" Hareta asked. "Yes. It is said to have raised the land masses and created the continents. It was said to have been calmed while battling its archenemy, Kyogre, and took sleep afterwards," Alakazam said. "If Groudon awakens and escapes the Magma Cavern, there will be chaos. It must be stopped!" Ninetales said. "We will go stop it," Alakazam said. "So will

we!" Charmander said. "No. Only us. Groudon will be a formidable opponent, and even though you've worked hard to come out here, the journey has taken its toll on all of you. To battle Groudon as you are will be far more dangerous. Let us handle this," Alakazam said. "Right. You should all head back to Pokemon Square, clear up the rumors Gengar has spread, and get a well-deserved and much-needed rest," Charizard said. "You don't have to worry about us. They don't just give out the Gold Rank, after all. We'll take care of things and be back soon," Tyranitar added. "Fine. Team ACT, move out!" Alakazam said, and they headed for the cave entrance, stopping partway out until the shaking died down.

As they watched Team ACT leave, Ninetales said, "I'm inclined to agree with them. Some rest will surely do you all some good. Since it's almost nightfall, you should all stay here for the night, since it's warmer in here. Then you can set out for home in the morning." Team Go-Getters took her up on the offer and she showed the way up the cliffs on the wall to a room where that was big enough for them all.

The following day...

Refreshed after a good night's sleep, the four members of Team Go-Getters were ready to set out for home in order to clear Hareta's name. Before they left, Ninetales stopped Hareta, saying she wanted to speak to him alone for a moment. Although Chikorita didn't like the idea, she gave in and went to go wait near the entrance to the passage into the room with the others.

Ninetales looked Hareta over for a moment, then said, "I know how it must feel for you, Hareta. Being filled with questions that no one can give you an answer to. But now that you can recall your name, the answers and memories will start coming to you a little bit at a time instead of rushing to you and overloading your head. Please, just remain patient." Hareta nodded, showing that he understood, then asked, "I can't recall exactly, but have we met before now? You seem familiar..." Ninetales smiled and said, "You are correct. We have met before. You gave me this scarf, in fact. Just give it a bit of time and you'll remember it yourself. And speaking of giving things..." She suddenly started leaping up the ledges and headed back for her personal area. After a few minutes, she came back carrying several items in her mouth. They were a red flat cap with a Poke Ball symbol on both sides, a red scarf, and an orange arm bracelet. "I've been saving these because I knew you would eventually come out here. Try them on and make sure they fit," she said. Hareta did so, putting on the cap so the front of it dangled over the front of his head, wrapped the scarf over his Pecha Scarf so that one end went down to his chest while the other went about the same length down his back, and slipped the arm bracelet on his right arm. Ninetales looked him over, then smiled and said, "My, you look very good with those on, Hareta." He blushed a bit at her comment. Suddenly they heard Charmander calling, "Hey, Hareta! Everything okay in there?" He turned and shouted, "Just fine! Be there in a minute!" He turned back to Ninetales who said, "I've kept you long enough. You should get going." He smiled and said, "Alright then, I hope to see you again soon, Ninetales!" As he turned to leave, she bent down suddenly and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek, making his

face go bright red. "Please be careful," she whispered, then climbed up the ledges to go back to her living space. Hareta was frozen in place for a moment longer, wondering why she did that.

Outside, the others were beginning to wonder why Hareta was taking so long when he stepped out of the cave to rejoin them. "There you are. What..." Absol was cut off when he noticed Hareta's new look. Chikorita blushed a bit, thinking that he looked good with the new additions. "Where'd you get those?" Charmander asked. "Ninetales said she was holding onto them for me," Hareta said. "Well, they do like good on you," Charmander commented. "Yeah, that's what she said too," Hareta said. "Well, now that that's all cleared up, should we get going?" Absol asked. "Yeah, I can't wait to see Pokemon Square again," Chikorita said. With that, Team Go-Getters began to make their way down Mt. Freeze, putting an end to their arduous journey and returning home to their Rescue Team Base.

* * *

Music:

Scaling Mt. Feeze - Mt. Freeze (PMD: Red/Blue Rescue Team), Servants of the Mountain (Final Fantasy X)

Battle with Team ACT - Team Galactic Battle (Super Smash Brothers Brawl)

The Legendary Kitsune - Ninetales (PMD: Red/Blue Rescue Team)

The Truth Revealed - Fugitive (PMD: Red/Blue Rescue Team)

The Heaving Earth - Tricked (PMD: Red/Blue Rescue Team)

Journey Home - Aboard the Hilda Garde (Final Fantasy IX)

21. Dark Deed Revealed

Small forest west of Pokemon Square

After two weeks of traveling to locate Ninetales, Team Go-Getters finally managed to locate her and learned that Squirtle, now known as Hareta to them, was not the human spoken of in the legend, which meant they could return with their new friend Absol to Pokemon Square while Team ACT went to quell Groudon. Their journey home went by quickly, due to them raising their levels high during throughout the journey, so it only took a week to get to the forest they were passing through at the moment. Along the way, Hareta had begun to recall more memories, though they were coming slowly and he was making sure they were all set in his head, so he didn't say much about them on the journey home.

"Okay, this is just a small patch of woodland, so it shouldn't take us long to get through. After this, it won't take very long to get back to Pokemon Square," Charmander announced. "Sounds good. I think I could use a bath. Believe it or not, I think I still have a bit of frost on me from

when we were on Mt. Freeze," Chikorita said, shaking a bit to see if anything fell off. "I can believe it. Didn't Articuno say that the snow up north has never melted until now?" Hareta asked. "Yes, she did say that. Since it has been that way for so long, I wouldn't be surprised if it could take a while for the feeling of having snow on you to fade," Absol commented. With this light conversation they were making, the four continued to work their way through the greenery.

As they were getting close to the end, Absol suddenly froze, and the others quickly turned around as he did. "What's the matter, Absol?" Hareta asked. "I can sense a presence... Someone is coming!" Absol said. "What? C'mon, we'd better hide until we know who it is!" Charmander said, and everyone agreed with him. So they quickly took shelter in the bushes, crouching down so it would be harder to be seen.

After about a minute of waiting, they began to hear footsteps on the grass approaching. Peeking above the top of the grass slightly, they recognized the figure as Medicham! "Hey, look who it is, guys. It's Medicham," Chikorita whispered. "And it doesn't look like Gengar or Ekans are with her either," Charmander noted. "You mean her teammate and leader?" Absol asked. "Right. She must've come out this way alone," Hareta whispered. "Maybe we should do something to surprise her. Any ideas?" Charmander asked. "I've got one. Want me to tell you?" Hareta asked. The others nodded and came closer to listen...

Medicham sighed, enjoying the peace and quiet that was present in the small grove of trees and glad to come out to experience it. She sat with her back to a tree in order to meditate, completely blocking out the world and being alone with her thoughts. After several minutes of this, she let herself come back to the world and slowly opened her eyes. She then said, "My, that was nice. Hmm, thinking of nice, I wonder what's going on with the babies from Team Go-Getters. It's been three weeks since they were chased out and there hasn't been a word since. Probably ended up begging to be let off easy and someone actually couldn't bear to take care of them since they were on their knees." She giggled to herself at that. It wasn't the thought that they might be begging that amused her, it was the childishness of the idea.

She stopped giggling when she heard someone say, "Is that what you think?" It wasn't a voice she had heard before, so she glanced around and asked, "Huh? Who's there?" Suddenly, something dropped onto her face, obscuring her view and she began to fidget wildly, trying to make whatever it was get off. "If that's what you think, then you would be wrong," a cheery, familiar voice said. As soon as she heard it, Medicham stopped completely, knowing it could only belong to one Pokemon. "Don't tell me..." she said. Releasing his hands from her eyes, Hareta said, "Nice to see you again too." Medicham attempted to grab him, but he simply used his arms to propel himself off her and towards the ground, withdrawing into his shell and sliding a bit before popping back out. Medicham looked at Hareta, noting the new apparel additions, and said, "You! What are you doing back here, Squirtle?" Hareta simply said, "It's not just me." At that, Charmander, Chikorita, and Absol came out of the nearby bushes. Medicham looked over the four of them and instantly knew that going up against even one would probably be bad for her. "Oh geez.

I've got to tell Gengar," she said, and took off running for Pokemon Square.

Team Go-Getters watched her go before they took off running as well, wanting to be back in town by the time Medicham delivered the news. They all thought it was a good plan, as it did what they wanted it to do.

Back in Pokemon Square...

Gengar was standing in the town center, Ekans off to his right and Pichu, Pikachu, Lombre, Snubbull, Bellsprout, and Shiftry standing in front and around him. "I've heard that there's still no word on Team Go-Getters yet. How come no one has reported back yet?" he asked the Pokemon in front of him. Lombre and Snubbull looked at each other while Shiftry looked at both of them. "It sounds like it would be easy... But chasing them is way too much for us to find out anything," Lombre said. "They say Team Go-Getters has gone far out there. We just made it to Lapis Cave when we first joined the chase. I doubt we could get any farther," Snubbull added. "I joined the chase for a while... But they were headed to Mt. Blaze when I turned back. For the life of me, I can't stand getting too close to that mountain. Being part Grass-type means fire doesn't agree with me at all. And that's where the other teams lost their trail as well. So I have no idea what became of them after that," Shiftry said. He then continued, "But those kids... To think that they would risk crossing Mt. Blaze..." He grinned and said, "They've grown up tough so quickly! I can't keep up! Ha ha ha!"

Gengar softly sighed and said, "Well, if that's the case, then no hurry. The news will come sooner or later." Lombre glared at Gengar and said, "You're one to talk! What about you and your team, Gengar? Almost every day, you guys just hang around in the square and don't do anything. Why don't you guys go?" Gengar turned to him and said, "Nope. That's not what we're supposed to do. We're supposed to not do anything until we get word on Squirtle's demise. T-that's all..." he said, looking away as he finished. Shiftry looked at him and said, "Huh! Just went ahead and declared that, did you?"

"Oh my gosh! Oh dear me!" someone was exclaiming. Everyone turned to see Medicham running towards them, stopping when she reached the center to catch her breath. "What is it, Medicham? What's gotten you so excited?" Gengar asked. After catching her breath, Medicham said, "It's Squirtle! He's..." Gengar looked worried as he said, "What? He hasn't been taken care of, has he?" Medicham said, "No! Just the opposite! He's back! As well as Charmander and Chikorita!" Gengar and Ekans both looked surprised, Ekans exclaiming, "They're all back?"

Everyone turned to the square entrance to see Squirtle (who was wearing a red scarf over his Pecha Scarf, a bracelet on his right wrist, and a flat cap that went out over the front of his head), Charmander, Chikorita, and a new team member, Absol, walking up the path. "H-hey! They're coming!" Shiftry cried, overjoyed at this. Pichu and Pikachu were also overcome with joy at this sight, both shouting, "Squirtle! Charmander! Chikorita!" Snubbull looked surprised as he said, "Th-they are back..."

With the town's initial shock over with, the four continued walking until they were in the heart of Pokemon Square. "Hi, everyone! We're back!" Hareta said cheerfully. Charmander looked around and thought, "_We finally made it back. We were gone for so long, it feels like forever since we were here._" Gengar stepped forward and said, "Um, Team Go-Getters?" Chikorita shot an angry look at him as she said, "Oh, it's you, Gengar. It's been a while, hasn't it?" Gengar got nervous, thinking, "_Yikes, she sure seems to be confident. Did they...?_" Charmander turned to Gengar and, glaring, said, "Gengar! You knew it all along, didn't you? Squirtle, no, Hareta had nothing to do with it! Hareta was innocent!" Although everyone was confused with Charmander's use of the name Hareta, since they didn't know that was his name, everyone figured he was referring to Squirtle. "O-oh, is that s-so?" Gengar asked, totally nervous now. "W-what?" Lombre exclaimed. "Is it true, Squirtle?" Shiftry asked. "You bet. We met Ninetales and she helped remember my name. She also said I'm not the human from the legend," Hareta explained. "So we returned because we learned the truth," Chikorita added. Gengar glanced around at everyone, who were all looking at him, and said, "Well, I'm convinced. Uh, is everyone else convinced too?" Pichu stepped forward and said, "Of course! I always believed in, uh, Squirtle! I never believed what you said for a minute!" Everyone looked at Shiftry who said, "I'm out. Squir- no, Hareta, Charmander, and Chikorita risked their lives battling Zapdos to save me. I joined the chase with a heavy heart because the other teams were urging me... But I don't believe Hareta being bad in any way, especially not that way." Lombre glared at Gengar and said, "I've heard enough too! I believe Squirtle!" Snubbull added, "Yeah, that's right! They don't even need to prove it to us!" Team Go-Getters were feeling a bit overwhelmed at how much everyone believed in them, while Gengar was feeling a bit nervous with everyone looking at him. Suddenly, they all heard, "Extra! Extra! Read all about it!" They looked up to see the Pelipper who usually delivered mail to Team Go-Getters drop several papers into the square. "What's this?" Ekans asked. "It's a newspaper... Isn't it?" Medicham asked. Absol came forward and picked one up in his paw, looking it over. "Yes, it is a newspaper. I'll read it aloud," he said. Everyone gathered closer to hear him. "Pokemon News =EXTRA=: Squirtle/Hareta Innocent! Team Go-Getters met with Ninetales under the watchful eye of Team ACT. And proved that Hareta had nothing to do with the human in the legend. As a result, Gengar's claims were found to be malicious lies. -End-" the newspaper said.

That confirmed it for everyone. "Why you rotten..." Lombre said. Gengar thrust his arms out in front of him and cried, "W-wait! Let me explain something!" Shiftry growled, "Explain what? Trying to make another lie?" Bellsprout added, "We've heard enough come out of you, Gengar. So now..." Before Bellsprout could finish, Hareta yelled, "EVERYONE, KNOCK IT OFF!" Everyone jumped nearly five feet at this. They looked back at Hareta, and even Charmander and Chikorita were surprised to see him looking very angry. "Give him a chance to explain before you do anything! You gave me a chance back when he accused me. And I'd like to hear what he has to say," Hareta said. Everyone remembered that Hareta was given a chance to explain, and reluctantly allowed Gengar a chance to speak. Gengar looked around warily, then began to tell everyone what happened to him three weeks ago...

**Flashback: Darkness Ridge**

Gengar walked between the two stone columns that marked the entrance to Darkness Ridge, a small area most likely inhabited by Pokemon who can turn an area dark to cause mischief. He slumped against a tree, tired from having to hike through the mountain range to get here. He had been relaxing at home after a typical day when suddenly he got a paper dropped in front of his door saying that he had to come to Darkness Ridge alone tonight in order to discuss Squirtle. It went on to say that if he didn't come, he might not wake up to tomorrow. Intimidated by this threat, he set out for the mountains by himself, just as the note said.

"Geez, why would anyone want to come out at night just to talk about that little dork? And what am I supposed to discuss about him? And with who?" Gengar wondered to himself, seeing that nobody was there. That thought left his head, as he suddenly could feel a presence entering Darkness Ridge. He looked into the air where it seemed to coming from, and spotted a Honchkrow whose feathers seemed to be paler than an average Honchkrow. As he landed, Gengar also noted that both of his sclera were black and he had red eyes, both of which gave him the shivers. He looked over at Gengar and said, "You have come. I like one who can answer an urgent call."

Gengar stood up and said, "Look, pal, it's getting late, and I'm not thrilled about coming out here at this hour to discuss anything about some kid. So spill it and let's get this over with." The Honchkrow smirked and said, "Of course. But first we haven't done the proper introductions. I am Faust. And you?" Gengar simply said, "Gengar." Faust let out a laugh, which annoyed Gengar. "What's so funny?" he demanded. Faust stopped laughing and said, "Oh, nothing. Now, I'm sure you were wondering why I asked you to come out here, yes?" Gengar growled and said, "That's basically what I said a minute ago." Faust looked bemused as he said, "Short and to the point, are we? Very well. I wanted to tell you something about that Squirtle who is a part of Team Go-Getters." Gengar asked, "What about him?" Faust leaned over and said, "He's not really a Squirtle. He's actually a human." Gengar looked surprised, but then said sarcastically, "Right. Okay. The little half-pint is a human. I'm sure." Faust glowered at him, but said, "Don't believe me, eh? Well, you can deny it if you want, but Xatu, that nut on the Hill of the Ancients, said that Squirtle is a human, so that's proof enough." Gengar's eyes went wide at this, since although he never met Xatu before, he heard from others that the wacky bird was spot on in everything he said. "So... That kid really is a human?" Gengar asked. "Indeed. And do you know why I am telling you this?" Faust asked. Gengar shook his head, so Faust gestured for him to come closer. "Now that you have this information, here's what you're going to do..."

_As Faust explained his plan to Gengar, the Ghost-type's face began to slowly show a look of horror at what the bird was telling him to do. Finally, he pulled away from him and said, "Forget it, pal. I may be mean, but I'm not a jerk. I respect the kid enough to not do anything severe to him or his friends, and he helped me even though he didn't have to. I'm not going to rat on him." At this, Faust narrowed his eyes as far as they could go and, emotionlessly, said, "Yes you will. You'll do it

and you're going to enjoy every moment of it. Or else..." Gengar said, "Or else what?" Suddenly, Faust shot forward with a Shadow Rush, sending Gengar flying over the ground before landing hard on his back. Gengar groaned as he tried to pull himself up, muttering, "What was that? I've never seen an attack like that..." Faust landed on top of him, forcing Gengar to remain on his back, and said, "You see that power? That's exactly what Squirtle's going to get once he is suitably away from any sign of help. And that's just one of the punishments you'll get if you refuse to go through with this." Gengar looked up at him and asked, "One? What else will you do?" Faust displayed an evil grin on his beak as he said, " You can end up joining him when everyone turns on him, because I do know about a certain time that made you who, or rather, what you are right now." Gengar's eyes went wide with dread at this. "No! You wouldn't tell everyone that!" Faust grinned, "I can make it sound like you're both guilty. But that's if you don't do what I say. So what's your answer now?" Gengar thought for a moment, before submitting and said, "Alright... I'll do it..." Faust flapped his wings, lifting off Gengar and preparing to fly away. Before doing so, he said, "It'd better be done tomorrow, or I'll do something even worse than that." With that said, he took off into the distance. "And even if this doesn't work, I still have a back-up plan... Either way, I'll make him pay for all he's done to me..." Faust mused to himself, grinning devilishly._

Back at Darkness Ridge, Gengar sat on the ground as he watched Faust leave, feeling afraid of Faust's threat, but also ashamed that he was agreeing to do what Faust asked. "Argh... No good is going to come of this... But I have no choice now... I just hope Squirtle can stop him..." he thought as he stood up and began to make his way back to Pokemon Square.

**End flashback**

"...And that's why I did what I did..." Gengar concluded. Medicham and Ekans looked worried for him, while the other Pokemon seemed to be considering if he was lying or not. "What do the rest of you think?" Shiftry asked. "I'm not sure... It's hard to tell," Bellsprout said. "Hmm... Red eyes and black sclera," Hareta murmured. "An off-color Honchkrow," Charmander muttered. "And Shadow-type attacks," Chikorita added. Then they all said, "It was him!" Everyone looked at them, so Hareta explained, "After we left Frost Village, we were attacked by that Faust guy! He tried to take us out!" Surprised, Lombre asked, "So Gengar is telling the truth?" Gengar murmured, "Keh. I said I would tell the truth." Ekans inched his way over to Gengar and whispered, "Maybe now would be a good time to leave, while they're all still in thought." Reluctantly, Gengar agreed and Team Meanies slowly began to make their way towards the town entrance so that no one would look up suddenly since they were all deep in thought now.

"Wait, Gengar!" they heard, and all three Pokemon halted on the spot. Gengar turned back to see Hareta coming towards them. "What? What do you want? To beat the purple out of me?" Gengar asked. "No. I just wanted to tell you something," Hareta said, stopping in front of him. "What?" Gengar asked. "I forgive you," Hareta said. Gengar was dumbstruck. "W-what?" was all he could say. "I forgive you. Faust is really someone to

be feared, so I can't blame you for doing what you did because you didn't want to see what he'd do to you. And it helped me find the answers I've been looking for since I came here. Honestly, I should be thanking you for making me a fugitive. So I am," Hareta explained. "Uh... Th-that's great, uh, Squirtle," Gengar shakily said. He began to shake a bit as he said, "I've got to go now. I think there's something in my eye." And with that, he ran off with Medicham and Ekans following behind.

Hareta watched them go, then turned to see Charmander, Chikorita, Absol, Pikachu, and Pichu approaching him. "Did something happen, Hareta? You just took off running a minute ago," Chikorita said. "No, nothing happened. Just thought I saw Team Meanies go this way," Hareta said. "Well, it was probably good that they left. The Pokemon in town do feel bad for him, but they're still not sure they can trust him," Charmander said. Pichu walked up to him and said, "I'm so glad... It's so great that you're back now, Squirtle!" As Hareta patted Pichu on the head, Pikachu added, "You have no idea how much he's been talking about seeing you guys come back. And Raichu and I certainly shared those thoughts!" Absol walked over to Hareta and said, "I'm going to go look for a place near here where I can stay. I'll be back tomorrow to let you know where I'm staying, alright?" Hareta, Charmander, and Chikorita nodded, and Absol took off to the left of the Team Base. After he disappeared from sight, Charmander said, "That's right. Starting tomorrow, we've got to get back into our rescue work. We should all get a good night's sleep to be ready for that." Everyone agreed with him and they all thrust their arms in the air, shouting, "TEAM GO-GETTERS, BACK IN ACTION!"

* * *

Music:

Close to Pokémon Square- Hyrule Field (The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap)

Back in Town- Village of the Blue Maiden (The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures)

Meeting with Faust- Leap in the Dark (Final Fantasy X)

Faust's Threat- Seymour's Ambition (Final Fantasy X)

Hareta's Forgiveness and Best Friends- You're Not Alone! (Final Fantasy IX)

22. The Wacky Request

It has been several days since Team Go-Getters returned from their journey, and things have fallen back into a routine nicely. Absol has located a good place to live that's near the village, as well as locating the Darkness Ridge to add to Team Go-Getters' list of Friend Areas. Over the course of these days, everyone living in Pokemon Square has told Hareta how great it is to have him, Charmander, and Chikorita back, and apologized for suspecting him. Due to Absol's history as the Disaster

Pokemon, not everyone has warmed up to him yet, but they're learning to trust him. Team Meanies hasn't been seen in Pokemon Square since Team Go-Getters returned, and most of the Pokemon still aren't sure if they can believe Gengar's story or not. As for Team Go-Getters' rescue work, they've been handling every job they take as steadily as before, with Absol and Pikachu helping them out from time to time, while Pichu and Raichu continue to train at the dojo to get stronger.

After the hard work done today, Hareta was back at the Team Base, glad to be sleeping on the rock that served as a bed. Tonight, he was being visited with a dream he hasn't had in a while.

**Hareta's Dream**

Hareta opened his eyes and looked around. All around him, he could see swirling colors as well as a landscape beginning to form before his eyes. Far beneath where he was floating, he could see cities, towns, forests, and a snow-covered landscape beginning to form. As this became clear, he realized he must be on a mountain, which was currently beginning to form underneath him. First the grayish rocky slopes formed, the slopes beneath him being covered by clouds, while the rocks extended up and around the area he was in, making him think this was in a crater. Suddenly, an ancient structure appeared, separating him from the rocky ground. The structure was made of stone, being mostly flat with spear-like pillars jutting up from it. One end had a cave entrance, while the other ended at part of the rocky wall. Hareta recognized it as the Spear Pillar.

"This... It's that dream... Again... It's been a while... Is Gardevoir here?" he whispered to himself. As he looked around, he felt a familiar presence, and turned to see the spirit form of Gardevoir floating there.

"It's you... Gardevoir," Hareta said. After he finished speaking, Gardevoir's translucent body materialized so she looked less ghostly.

"Yes..." she whispered. She slowly touched down on the ground and walked over to him, kneeling over so they were about eye-level.

"Gardevoir. There are so many things that I want to know. Why do you appear to me when I dream?" Hareta asked. She began, "As an agent of the spirits, I must watch over you... Because that is my role now."

"An agent of the spirits?" Hareta wondered. "Yes. I fell under the curse of Ninetales in place of a Trainer... And so became a presence lacking a physical form," Gardevoir explained. "Trainer? Oh, you mean the human that was in the Legend of Ninetales. It's so sad that your Trainer would abandon you and run away like he did," Hareta said. "Yes," Gardevoir said, smiling. "My Trainer was a terrible person. Mean, sneaky... My Trainer was quite a misguided person. Truly. Even so, I don't hate my Trainer."

_"You don't? How come?" Hareta asked. "Well... I'm not sure myself. It's hard to explain," Gardevoir said. "My Trainer did some awful things, yet somehow, I can't bring myself to feel that way. In spite of those quirks,

there were good qualities to him too. And when it happened, I was desperate to protect him..."_

"It? You mean Ninetales' curse?" Hareta asked. "Yes. I protected my Trainer from Ninetales' curse with my entire being. If the Trainer is facing danger, it is our duty to protect them with our lives... We Gardevoir are like that. I kept my Trainer safe. It was enough to make me happy," Gardevoir explained. "Protect the trainer even at the cost of one's life... That's really cool what Gardevoir did," Hareta thought to himself. "Oh, I must mention I don't mind the form I have taken. I live on this way, with pride in the role I have been given," she added.

"Your role?" Hareta asked Gardevoir. "Yes. All things have a role. They all serve a purpose. Just I have my own role, you too have a role that you must fulfill. You came here to perform a certain role... And, in order to perform your role, Hareta, you became a Pokemon," she explained.

"What? What do you mean?" Hareta asked. Suddenly, a tremor began to rock the Spear Pillar, startling Hareta. As the area shook, Gardevoir began to vanish.

"No! Wait! I want to know..." Hareta tried to say, but it was no use. Gardevoir was gone, and the area began to fade into darkness...

**Blackness. Then a light appeared...**

Hareta awoke to the sun shining on his face. As he sat up, he rubbed the last bits of sleepiness out of his eyes, then dropped into the water in the pond to make sure he was fully up and ready. Afterwards, he climbed out and went over to the toolbox, where he kept his hat, Pecha Scarf, red scarf, and orange wristband. As he put these on, he began to think about last night.

"_There was an earthquake... Right? I think I had that dream again, and I spoke with Gardevoir... She said something important... Oh right! She did! She said I came here for a certain role, which is why I became a Squirtle! She knows the reason! She also mentioned something about a role... What did she mean?"_ Shrugging, Hareta finished putting his gear on, then slung the toolbox over his shoulder and went outside to find that Charmander and Chikorita had just arrived.

"Good morning, Hareta!" they both said. Chikorita then noticed Hareta seemed a bit preoccupied, so she asked, "Is something wrong? Do you feel okay?" Charmander piped in saying, "It's probably because of that earthquake earlier. You're worried too, right, Hareta? Team ACT hasn't come back yet... And they say that Groudon is powerful, so it is reason to worry a bit. But remember, Alakazam's team is tough. I'm sure they'll be fine." Hareta nodded and said, "I know. And we agreed to let Team ACT deal with Groudon. I haven't forgotten." Charmander said, "Then let's not spend too much time worrying about them and wait for them to come back. We'll stick to our part until then." Chikorita smiled and said, "So then let's keep doing good work for our Rescue Team!"

With that said, they prepared to leave when they suddenly heard someone say, "Uh... Um..." This caught their attention and they walked out to the path and saw two blue Pokemon approaching. When they reached Team Go-Getters, they stopped, and the smaller one said, "Um... I'm Wynaut, and this is..." The bigger Pokemon brought his right arm to his head and said, "Wobbuffet!" Wynaut continued, "We have a notice posted on the Message Board outside the Pelipper Post Office." Wobbuffet once again brought his arm to his head and said, "That's right!" Wynaut continued, "Please look at it for us. Please, please." Once again, Wobbuffet seemingly wacked himself and said, "Wobbuffet!!!" Wynaut finished with, "Please help. We have to go now." Again, Wobbuffet brought his arm up and said, "That's right!" And with that, the two walked down the path leading away from Team Go-Getters' base.

The trio turned to each other and Charmander asked, "What was that all about?" Chikorita asked, "That little Pokemon... Did he say he was Wynaut?" Hareta nodded and said, "I think he was asking us to look at the Message Board. Maybe they have a problem and put a request up." Charmander said, "Well, there's only one thing to do. Let's go check the Pelipper Post Office Message Board and see." With that, Team Go-Getters ran towards the bridge leading into town, Hareta running along the side of Charmander and Chikorita.

Pokemon Square: Pelipper Post Office

Soon, Team Go-Getters stood in front of the Message Board, and all three began to scan the board to see what sort of requests were currently up. Suddenly, Hareta spotted one and pulled it down, looking it over and then showing it to Charmander and Chikorita. Suddenly, they noticed Wobbuffet and Wynaut coming up the path towards them, so they walked over to meet with them.

"Hey, we just picked this job off the Message Board. It says, 'Punish bad Mankey,'" Charmander said. "Is that the job that you two were talking about?" Chikorita asked. "Yup, yup!" Wynaut said. "That's right!" Wobbuffet added. Wynaut then explained, "A gang of Mankey is going wild in the forest where we live. Everyone is upset about this." Wobbuffet chimed in, "That's right!" Then Wynaut continued, "We don't know why they're rampaging around. But they're always angry and attack anyone they see!" Wobbuffet added, "That's right!"

"Oh no... That is a problem," Charmander said. "Maybe we should head over to the Kecleon Brothers Shopping Wares to see if there's anything we need," Hareta offered. "Good idea. Then we'll put our extra Poke in the bank and head out," Chikorita said. "Thank you! We're counting on you!" Wynaut said. Wobbuffet added, "That's right!" With that, the two left to go visit Whiscash in his pond.

Later, the entrance to Uproar Forest

After taking care of their chores and checking their Wonder Map, Team Go-Getters set out for Uproar Forest. After leaving Pokemon Square, they headed north past Mirage Woods, then passed by the Sinister Cave entrance as they headed east and soon found themselves at the beginning of Uproar

Forest. They noticed that the trees and plants had more of a yellow-green color rather than a regular green to them as they walked into the forest.

As they walked through the forest, they encountered very few Pokemon. They ran afoul of a group of Aipom, and later several Nuzleaf called in a Monster House in an attempt to stop them, but both of these attempts amounted to nothing since Team Go-Getters were at a much higher level. They also encountered some wild Venonat, Roselia, and Seedot, but the most intriguing thing about Uproar Forest was its with weather. One minute the sun is shining and there's not a cloud in the sky; the next minute there's a snowstorm or hailstorm blowing through the area. In spite of all this, Team Go-Getters marched onwards, looking for the angry Mankey gang.

As they came closer to a clearing, they found several chestnuts, which Hareta grabbed for their food stores. Soon they found the entrance to the clearing, where they saw three Mankey. When the Mankey saw them, one of them asked, "Hey, what's with you three?" Another said, "We don't mean to brag or nothing... But we lose our tempers really easily." The third said, "What really gets us going is when we see some dim-witted expression. Just looking at those blank faces..." Suddenly, they all began to glare at the trio. "Grr! I'm seeing red here!" the second Mankey said. "Mukkkeeeeeh! Get 'em! It's frenzy time!" the first shouted.

The three Mankey came rushing towards Team Go-Getters, but because of their higher level, each team member ended up knocking the Mankey they were fighting with just one attack. They stared in shock at how easily they overcame the three for a moment, then decided to pack it up and head home before the Mankey recovered.

Later, back in front of Team Go-Getters base

Team Go-Getters faced Wynaut and Wobbuffet, who were waiting to hear the good news. "Like we promised, we showed those Mankey that they shouldn't mess with others," Charmander told them. "From now on, maybe they won't be so wild," Chikorita said.

"Everyone, thank you for everything, really," Wynaut said. Wobbuffet added, "That's right!" Wynaut nodded and said, "Yes, we're filled with gratitude! Here, this is our thanks." He came over and handed a peeled chestnut over to Hareta.

"Oh, a peeled chestnut?" Hareta asked. "Yes. It's a peeled chestnut. You see, we... Don't have any money," Wynaut explained. Wobbuffet bopped himself and said, "That's right!" Wynaut then said, "So we can only give you a chestnut as our reward. Are you unhappy?" Hareta waved his hands and said, "Oh, no. It's okay. Peeled chestnuts are good to have after all." Charmander and Chikorita agreed with him.

"Hey, you!" Everyone heard an angry shout and turned to see the Mankey gang standing there! "Aw, no! The Mankey gang followed us back!" Charmander exclaimed. "Wobbuffet?" Wobbuffet asked. "They must be here to get us back," Chikorita guessed. The Mankeys came closer, stopping in front of Team Go-Getters. The leader Mankey said, "That's right, girlie!

You three got lucky! You don't mess with us!" The Mankey standing to the right of him said, "We won't lose this time! We'll pulverize you!" The Mankey on the leader's left shouted, "Mukkeeeeh! Crush them!" As the Mankey were about to attack, Team Go-Getters braced themselves, but they didn't feel anything after a few seconds. Cautiously, they peeked their eyes open to see the Mankeys looking at them with wide eyes. "W-what are they staring at us for?" Chikorita asked.

Suddenly, the Mankey turned to each other and began to whisper amongst themselves. "What are they doing?" Hareta asked. "It looks like... They're having a discussion," Wynaut said. "That's right!" Wobbuffet said, intrigued. Suddenly, the Mankey turned back to them and the leader said, "Uh, listen. You've got something we want... That peeled chestnut in his hand," he gestured over at Hareta. "Can we have it?" he asked. The Mankey on his right said, "We, uh... Well, we love peeled chestnuts!" The third said, "Like, we love them so much, we can't think of what life would be like without them!"

Charmander asked, "But can't you just get chestnuts yourselves?" The leader said, "You know how chestnuts have that spiky shell? Trying to peel or break it with your hands... That hurts. And then we lose our tempers! That's why we're asking. Give us that peeled chestnut. We'll do whatever you want in exchange."

Charmander thought for a moment, then said, "I've got it! Listen, Mankey gang, how are you with physical labor?" The leader asked, "Physical labor? Like muscle work?" The Mankey on his left said, "We have muscles... But we don't like work." The last Mankey said, "But for that peeled chestnut, we can make an exception."

"OK! Then here's what we'll do! We've been planning to make our Team Base something more impressive than this," Charmander explained. "Team Base?" one of the Mankey asked. "Right! Our Recue Team Base! If you'll help us build our Rescue Team Base, we'll give you the peeled chestnut!" Chikorita said, catching onto what Charmander was suggesting. The Mankeys whispered for a minute, then the leader turned to Team Go-Getters and said, "OK. We'll do it!" Hareta asked, "Really? You'll do it?" The leader replied, "Yeah. Just leave it to us! We'll carry in the materials and have this place built double-quick!" The Mankey to his left added, "In return, we get that peeled chestnut."

Suddenly, they heard footsteps coming from the direction of the village and they turned to see Pichu, Pikachu, and Raichu running towards them, screeching to a halt right in front of them. "We want to help too!" Pichu exclaimed. "We've got a bunch of spare building materials back at our house you can use," Pikachu explained. "We'll make good use of it in building you guys a new Rescue Team Base," Raichu added.

Wynaut and Wobbuffet stepped forward and Wynaut said, "I'll help too!" Wobbuffet added, "Wobbuffet!" Wynaut continued, "I felt bad because we only had a peeled chestnut for your reward. But this will surely make up for it!" Wobbuffet seconded this with a "That's right!!!"

Hareta then muttered, "Hmm... I wonder if..." Suddenly they heard a voice say, "Wonder no longer." They all turned to see Absol standing at the path leading to where he, Charmander, and Chikorita lived. "Yes. I'd be glad to help you in building your Team Base, Hareta," he said. "Man, I've heard news travels fast, but this is awesome!" Hareta said.

"OK! Let's get a move on!" the Mankey leader said. "OK!" his fellow gang members replied. And with that, they went to go lay out plans and prepare to construct the Rescue Team Base.

23. Current Happenings

It has been three days since the mission in Uproar Forest. Since then, Team Go-Getters have put their rescue work on hold in order to focus on building the Team Base. Wynaut, Wobbuffet, Pikachu, Pichu, Raichu, Absol, and the Mankey gang have been helping out with bringing in the materials and adding the additions. The only thing that has been slowing down the work is when the Mankeys ask for more peeled chestnuts, but the extra chestnuts Hareta picked up in Uproar Forest have managed to make it only a temporary slow-down. On this day, Hareta wakes up in the almost finished Team Base shortly before another earthquake rocks him.

"_Whoa, another earthquake..._" he thought to himself as he braced himself on the ground. Soon, the shaking died down and he stood up. "Guess it settled down. We've sure had a lot of earthquakes in this area lately..." he muttered as he went to get the toolbox and his personal items before going out the door.

As he stepped outside, Hareta noticed Charmander and Chikorita coming up the path. "Hello, Hareta! You're up earlier than usual," Chikorita chimed happily. "Did you feel the earthquake earlier? It's pretty hard to get some sleep when we experience so many earthquakes," Charmander commented. Hareta was about to say something when they heard a shout.

"Hey!" They all turned to see Raichu running up the walk to the front of the Team Base. "Oh, Raichu. What's the matter?" Charmander asked. Raichu explained, "Everyone's gathering in the square. You guys need to come over!" Chikorita looked at him confused and asked, "Is something wrong?" Raichu said, "I don't know, but Shiftry is calling for everyone to come, even other Rescue Teams. Whatever the reason, it has to be big if he's calling for Rescue Teams." With that, Raichu turned and headed back to town, Team Go-Getters following him.

Pokemon Square: Town Center

As they neared the town center, Hareta, Charmander, and Chikorita noticed that it was crowded with tons of Pokemon. They saw many that Charmander and Chikorita could not recall coming to Pokemon Square before. They noticed Pikachu and Pichu standing near Lombre and went over to join with them. "Hey, Team Go-Getters! Good to see you," Lombre said. "There sure are a lot of Pokemon here," Hareta commented. "Yeah, they must've sent out for a lot of Rescue Teams for whatever this is," Pikachu agreed.

"Indeed. There are some pretty famous leaders from faraway places here. I wonder what Shiftry called them all together for?" Lombre wondered.

Team Go-Getters turned their attention to the chattering Pokemon in the square, seeing Shiftry just past them. "Can I get everyone's attention here?" he called. The Pokemon stopped talking and all focused on him. "I, er... I'm not usually the kind who gets up in front of everyone like this, so..." He shook himself, then said, "Sorry. This isn't the time for that! There's big trouble! Alakazam's team, Team ACT, went underground... But they haven't returned yet!" Shiftry's announcement surprised everyone and many started murmuring to each other. One asked, "Is this true?" Shiftry said, "Unfortunately, yes. Team ACT went underground to quell the Legendary Pokemon, Groudon, and that was the last time they were seen. To be honest, no one has any idea what happened to them." Murmurs shot up through the crowd, voicing their disbelief of the fate of Team ACT and the power of Groudon.

Shiftry yelled, "Quiet, please! Just a minute!" Everyone turned back to him. "There's no denying that it is dangerous where Team ACT has gone. The Magma Cavern is not a place where just anyone can go. That's why I called so many Rescue Teams here today. I propose that a special team be formed by choosing from the best of the best." The Pokemon once again began to talk amongst themselves, while Shiftry tried to encourage strong Pokemon to step forward.

"Hey, guys. This is a good opportunity. We should go," Charmander said. Hareta thought so too, but Chikorita was a bit nervous about going to a hot place. Lombre then stepped in and pushed them back, saying, "Don't bother, you guys." Charmander looked at him and asked, "What are you doing? Let us pass." Lombre shook his head and said, "You guys have gotten really strong, there's no denying that. But there are other tough Pokemon out there. It doesn't have to be you three every time."

They turned back to the group of Pokemon, who were still talking amongst themselves. "Will no one step forward?!" Shiftry cried. Soon, the chattering died down and someone said, "I'll go." They all turned to see the volunteer was Blastoise, the leader of Team Hydro whose water cannons are capable of shooting water fast enough to punch through thick steel plates. Blastoise turned to the crowd and said, "It's rumored that Groudon is a Ground-type. I am a Water-type. Strong against Ground-types. My Hydro Pump will douse Groudon in one shot." Shortly after he finished, a female voice spoke out, "I'll go too." Everyone turned to see it was Octillery, leader of Team Constrictor and known for her persistent and clingy attacks. "Darlings, when I see a tough Pokemon, I simply want to tangle with them," she explained. "Say, how about not forgetting about me?" a gruff male voice asked. It came from Golem of Team Rumblerock, his body being rock hard and able to withstand huge explosions without taking damage. "If Groudon has awakened underground, that suits me fine. I'll use my Rock Throw to make sure it stays buried." Shiftry looked the three over and said, "Blastoise! Octillery! And Golem! No one could complain about your selection." They all turned back to the crowd and Shiftry announced, "These three rescuers will be the ones to head underground!" All the present Rescue Teams voiced their agreement and wished the team

luck. They continued to do so as the three headed out for the Magma Cavern.

"You see? Those three look pretty tough, don't they? Let them handle this," Lombre said to Team Go-Getters. "Well, it can't be helped now guys. We'll just have to wait," Chikorita said. Charmander and Hareta nodded, but deep down inside, Hareta felt that Alakazam not returning was not just because of Groudon. And that Groudon's awakening had to be because of somebody's influence...

With the meeting done, the Rescue Teams all decided to wait in Pokemon Square until the new team returned with Team ACT. Raichu, Pikachu, and Pichu left the square quickly, heading for Team Go-Getters' base to check up on the work. A bit afterwards, Team Go-Getters left the square too.

"It would be nice to go underground, but like Lombre said, Blastoise and the others can take care of things in the Magma Cavern," Chikorita said. "Right. We'll keep doing the best we can in our rescue work until we get word from them," Charmander said. Chikorita agreed, but they noticed Hareta was silent as if lost in thought. Before they could ask him anything, they were all broken out of their thoughts by a shout.

"Hey, guys!" They all looked to see it came from Pikachu, who was standing between Pichu and Raichu. "Oh hey! What's up?" Hareta asked. "It's a surprise for you guys!" Pichu said happily. The trio looked confused, so Raichu explained, "While we haven't had a problem with you guys helping, we didn't want you to be around when the final touches were done on your Team Base since we wanted the final look to be a surprise. So the Mankeys did it during the town meeting." This surprised and excited Team Go-Getters, who wanted to see it right away. So Pikachu, Pichu, and Raichu all came behind them and covered their eyes, Pichu climbing on Chikorita's back to cover hers. "No peeking until you're right there," Pikachu said. They then guided the trio in the right direction to the base.

"Okay, now you can look," Raichu said, and all three removed their hands from Team Go-Getters eyes. Chikorita almost started crying, Charmander gasped in amazement, and Hareta simply gawked.

Several boards that had served as the bridge over the pond had been replaced with a stone sidewalk that went all the way to the door. The mailbox had been colored a light blue and the top of it looked like a Squirtle shell. As for the base itself, the upper half looked like a Squirtle head, the doorway was red on both sides, and the rest of the lower half looked like a Squirtle shell, looping around. Behind the base was a flag with a Squirtle shell symbol, and a sign above the doorway said 'Team Go-Getters Rescue Team Base.' In front of the base were the Mankey gang, Absol, Wynaut, and Wobbuffet.

"It's amazing. I can't find the words to describe just how cool it is," Charmander said. Absol said, "If you like the outside, then I think the inside will impress you further." Pichu looked at Hareta and said, "The resemblance to you makes it all the cooler, Hareta!" Hareta blushed while everyone laughed. When they stopped, Raichu said, "Well, we all worked

very hard for this." Wynaut added, "Yeah, it was hard, but it was worth it!" Wobbuffet chimed in, "That's right!" Team Go-Getters looked at everyone, who had now moved behind the team, and Chikorita said, "Sniff... Everyone... Thank you!"

Everyone said they were glad to help, but the Mankey gang remained quiet. Then the leader said, "Say there. There's something I want to ask..." Everyone turned to them and the leader continued, "If this Rescue Team Base is finished, does that maybe mean... You won't bring us peeled chestnuts anymore?" Charmander laughed slightly and said, "Of course! We're done with the work on our Rescue Team Base. To our Mankey gang! Sincerely, thank you for everything! No way could it have been done this fast without you!"

The Mankey turned to each other a minute, then suddenly they shouted, "Ukkeeeeeeeeh!" They then ran towards the Team Base and began to attack it! "Hey, what are you doing?! Knock it off!" Hareta exclaimed. Team Go-Getters then ran forward and began to attack the Mankey since they wouldn't listen to reason. Soon, they managed to get them to stop, saving the Rescue Team Base. After a bit of talking, the Mankey gang promised to keep from rampaging in return for more peeled chestnuts. With that done, the Mankey returned to the forest, and the chaotic renovation of the Rescue Team Base came to an end.

The next morning: Pelipper Post Office

After a good night's sleep, Team Go-Getters got back to their rescue work. They arrived at the Message Board to see what jobs were available when one caught Hareta's eye. He pulled it down and read the title: "Smeargle's desperate plea." Intrigued by the title, Charmander asked him to continue. Hareta began reading: "Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Smeargle. I once had aspirations of becoming an artist. Then, one day... There was an incident of an unforgivable nature... I fled because I didn't want to become an adult. But then I lost my way... I now find myself in this forest, unable to extricate myself... I am lost in the Howling Forest! Somebody! Please save me!"

After a moment of silence, Charmander said, "He ran away because he didn't want to become an adult... What's that about?" Hareta shrugged and said, "I don't know. But let's go rescue this Smeargle anyway!" Charmander and Chikorita agreed, so they checked the Wonder Map to see where Howling Forest was located. After pinpointing it, they made their usual stops in town, during which Absol decided to come with, and then they set out for the Howling Forest.

To reach the Howling Forest, they took the same path they used to get to Thunderwave Cave, then went into the forest to the east of the cave's entrance. Due to their higher level, they got to the location in a shorter time than when they first came out this way.

The Howling Forest was one of the most diverse forests that Team Go-Getters ever explored, as they saw many different types of Pokemon as they made their way through. Many of them were all or part Normal or Dark-type Pokemon, but there were a few other types as well. They were

also a bit more cunning than some of the Pokemon that they had seen before as well.

As they worked their way through the forest, they would occasionally see the weather change quite suddenly, similar to Uproar Forest. They would see rain at times, and at other times there was hail. Eventually, they came across a cave entrance after exploring the woods for some time. Having no luck finding Smeargle in the forested area, they decided to see if Smeargle was somewhere in the cave.

Later, deep inside the cave

"Ohhh... I've lost my bearings... Where is this? I can't get out... I'm starving... I'm in trouble..." a grayish Pokemon with a tail like a paintbrush moaned. Suddenly, he heard footsteps and voices coming towards him and looked to see Team Go-Getters approaching. "Oh! You are?!" he cried. "We're Rescue Team Go-Getters! Are you Smeargle?" Charmander asked. "Yes I am! Did you maybe come here to rescue me?" At the team's nod, Smeargle exclaimed, "Am I glad to see you! Please, help me get out of here!" And with another nod, they set out for the exit and Pokemon Square.

Later, back at Team Go-Getters Base

"Thank you so much. You saved me from great peril," Smeargle gratefully said. "No problem, Smeargle," Hareta replied. "Yep. But what made you run away in the first place? Your letter mentioned something about not wanting to become an adult," Charmander said. Smeargle looked at them and said, "Well, that is... Oh!" At his exclamation, Hareta, Charmander, Chikorita, and Absol turned to see two Smeargle coming up the path.

"Look, there he is!" one of the Smeargle told the other. "Yeah, I see him. We've got to get him back quick!" the other Smeargle replied. "More Smeargle? I see two of them..." Charmander said. "I wonder what they're saying?" Chikorita wondered. "Probably getting ready to say the usual. You know, Smeargle can't escape, we're going to take him away, our fathers take bubble baths, and our mothers wear Army boots," Hareta joked. Everyone giggled a bit at Hareta's remark, then Absol asked, "Smeargle, what do they want?" Smeargle said, "They're... My friends."

The two Smeargle approached as everyone turned back to them. "Now, come with us. The grown-up ritual is ready for you," the Smeargle on the left said. "Quit fighting this. Have the paw print applied without a fuss," the other Smeargle said. The rescued Smeargle ducked behind Hareta and said, "N-no!" He peeked out from behind Hareta's shell and said, "If I have to get that paw print on my back, I'd rather not become a grown-up!"

Hareta looked between the Smeargle, then asked, "Am I missing something? What grown-up ritual are you talking about?" The Smeargle closest to him said, "It is a custom among us Smeargle. When we reach a certain age, they mark our backs with paw prints to show we are grown-ups." The other Smeargle continued, "They do that by taking the front paw and pushing doooooooowwnn on the back..." Smeargle once again poked his head out and

said, "I can't live with anything so tasteless. I have dreams of creating great art, so I have certain standards for design that I live by."

He then glanced at the members of Team Go-Getters, then suddenly he had a great idea. "I know! I have decided! I shall become a member of Team Go-Getters!" This came as a bit of a shock to the team, so he explained, "I will participate in your rescue activities!" He then walked over to his friends and said, "So... I won't return to the pack! This village is where I will dedicate myself!" This surprised his friends, but then they whispered to each other for a second, then one said, "Is... Is that so? Then there is nothing we can do." The other Smeargle said, "We will inform the elders of your decision. We wish you luck in your new career as a rescuer." And with that, they headed back to meet with their pack.

"Wow... That's a pushy way of getting a job. But it's OK, right guys?" Chikorita said. Hareta, Absol, and Charmander nodded, and they all welcomed Smeargle to the team. After thanking them, Smeargle said, "In addition to rescuing, I am also quite skilled at drawing and painting. For example... Let me see..." He looked around a bit, then spotted the flag in the back. "Ah, how about that. I could, say, redesign that flag if you wished. Would you like me to give you a demonstration?" Everyone nodded, and Smeargle suddenly examined the design on Hareta's hat, then ran towards the flag and began slapping his tail across it. When he was done, the shell had been changed to the design on Hareta's hat. Everyone was impressed at Smeargle's art skills. "If you ever want me to change it to something else, just let me know. I will find a place to stay in town, and I happen to know the location of the Sky Blue Plains Friend Area. Here let me show you," Smeargle said. He came over and showed the exact location of the Sky Blue Plains. They then headed for town to see if they could find Smeargle a place to stay.

Later that night, at the Magma Cavern

A peculiar figure was perched near the entrance to the Magma Cavern, seeming to be asleep as its eyes were closed. Suddenly, its eyes flashed open as if hearing an alarm clock. "Hmm... I can sense energy signatures exiting the Lapis Cave... But none of them are the guardian..." The figure thought for a moment, then grinned widely. "They must seek to prevent Groudon from escaping. Well, no matter. I'll make sure they don't even get to see that foolish Rescue Team that barely made it to Groudon a few days ago. Then I'll make sure they wind up back near that village that brat is staying at. And then, he'll take the bait and walk right into his doom..." The figure then threw its head back and laughed maniacally.

24. Courage and Pride

Five days have passed since Blastoise, Octillery, and Golem set out for the Magma Cavern to rescue Team ACT, and in that time, Team Go-Getters has ascended from Silver Rank to Gold Rank, thanks to their hard work and support from their friends and fellow team members, including the newest member, Smeargle. In addition, they have also been going back to the Makuhita Dojo to make sure their skills haven't been getting rusty. While

inside the dojo's various type rooms, Hareta also trains special abilities, which have been coming to him ever since his memory began to recover at Mt. Freeze. Although Master Makuhita is not exactly sure what his abilities are, both he and Hareta's friends do what they can to help him in any way they can to assist him in relearning his special abilities.

After a particularly grueling day training at the dojo, Hareta wakes up bright and early to the new day. After stretching to wake himself up, the morning quiet is suddenly shattered by an earthquake. Bracing himself, Hareta remains calm through it until the tremors settle down. At that point, he picks himself off the ground and looks around, marveling at the good work that went into renovating the Team Base. Before, there would occasionally be some kind of slight damage caused to the structure by an earthquake, but so far that hasn't happened with the renovated base. "_Man, there have been so many earthquakes lately. Are they happening because of Groudon's awakening? I wonder..._" he thought to himself, hoping that Blastoise's team was doing okay.

Suddenly, Charmander and Chikorita came running through the entrance towards him as he was stepping off of the rock. "Hareta! There's some kind of commotion going on in the square!" Charmander exclaimed. "A lot of Pokemon have already gathered there. Let's head over and see what's going on!" Chikorita added. Hareta nodded, and they all ran out the door, leaving the toolbox and everything else behind to wait for them.

Pokemon Square

Arriving in the town center, Team Go-Getters noted that all the Rescue Teams Shiftry had sent for had gathered. Chikorita spotted Lombre and called out to him, "Hey, Lombre! What's going on here?" Lombre turned to her and said, "Oh, Chikorita. W-well..." He stopped to look the other way, then said, "You should just go see for yourself..." At that remark, Hareta walked forward, followed by Charmander and Chikorita. When they reached the center of the colorful stone that marked the town center, they were surprised to see Blastoise, Octillery, and Golem collapsed against the pavement. Charmander looked up at Shiftry, who was behind the three, and said, "Shiftry! What happened?!" Shiftry looked at the three on the ground a moment, then looked up and said, "They were wiped out... In the Magma Cavern dungeon..."

Team Go-Getters couldn't believe it. "You're kidding!" Chikorita cried. Blastoise lifted his face up a bit and, groaning, said, "That place... Something about it is deadly..." Octillery opened her eyes and said, "We couldn't get far enough to see Groudon or even Team ACT..." Golem groaned, "I've been there before, but I've never seen anything like I did this time... I don't want to ever go back to that place if it stays this way..."

Shiftry looked at them, then said, "It appears that the dungeon underground... Is far more dangerous than we'd imagined..." Everyone let this sink into their thoughts and began to lose their fighting team spirit. Even a specially put together team couldn't conquer the Magma Cavern as it is; what possible hope did they have if they went?

Team Go-Getters stepped back towards Lombre, stopping near him. They turned around as the sound of footsteps caught their attention. It was Gengar. "What are you doing back here?" Lombre asked him angrily. "Hey, relax. I heard there was some commotion and came to see what was up. Looks like your special team can't do a simple thing right unless they know what they're up against," Gengar simply stated. "What's with you, Gengar?! It's only expected that we try. We're doing it to save Alakazam's team. We have to brave the unknown! You don't get that?" Charmander retorted. "No, I can see that quite clearly. I'm just saying that you all seem to be in over your heads with this challenge. Especially with the way they're feeling at this development," Gengar said, gesturing to the other Rescue Teams.

And what Gengar was right about the other Rescue Teams. All of them were afraid of going to the Magma Cavern, afraid of what would await them. They were all afraid of being wiped out in the dungeon, and many were afraid of earthquakes and fire in general. Even Shiftry was out, knowing that his leafy fans would burn up. "Hey, get over it! You can try all you want to, but if you don't know your limits, this is exactly what's going to happen to you! One minute you're confident you can take anything life can throw at you, then the next minute it's slapping you and teaching you a lesson you never wanted to learn. You might as well learn it now so it's not as humiliating for you later," Gengar spoke to the whole crowd. Due to the incessant talking, it was hard to tell if anyone actually heard what Gengar had to say.

Still, the words were registering doubt in Chikorita and Charmander's minds. As they looked at each other, they knew the same thought was on both their minds. What were they to do now? They both turned to Hareta and Charmander asked, "Squirtle... What do you think? Even if it's impossible for us... Should we still try to rescue Big Brother, Alakazam, and Tyranitar?" Hareta looked at them for a moment, then quickly said, "Of course! We're a Rescue Team! We dedicate ourselves to helping other Pokemon in danger, be they Pokemon who have gotten lost, Pokemon who need help getting something they need, or Rescue Teams that have gotten in trouble themselves! I wouldn't give up on any Pokemon just because I'm afraid of putting my pride as a rescuer at stake." His words moved both Charmander and Chikorita, finding their pride and courage thanks to the speech, and Chikorita said, "Of course... You're right, Hareta. We can't give up just because it seems impossible. We should go because we're willing to risk any danger to help other Pokemon." Charmander agreed and said, "Right. Let's let everyone else know too."

They then turned to the crowd and Charmander called, "Everyone, listen!" Once everyone's attention was on them, Charmander announced, "We're going to the Magma Cavern to rescue Team ACT!" This completely shocked everyone in the square; none of them could believe a group of kids was volunteering to go when an attempt to conquer the dungeon had already failed. Gengar was especially concerned; he didn't know how Groudon could be waking up, but he wasn't too keen on the idea of Hareta and his team going to their doom after just recently having been attacked by someone who seemed to have it in for Hareta. Murmurs began to spread through the crowd again, this time wondering who this Rescue Team was. Some of them

knew that they were Team Go-Getters, and others heard about them living as fugitives until recently. They had their doubts as they didn't think the team looked very strong.

Hareta spoke up, "It's true we may not look like much, and that the rescue may be difficult. But we are a Rescue Team!" Charmander backed him up, "To overcome any challenges and rescue Pokemon in danger... That's why we became a Rescue Team in the first place! That's why rescuing Alakazam and his teammates is most important to us!" Chikorita wrapped it up with, "Never giving up... A simple phrase that Team Go-Getters stakes its pride on! We have pride as a team because we're willing to take on any challenge to help others!"

With their speech done, silence came to the square. Gengar broke it by saying, "C'mon you three. Like I said, learn your limits, just like everyone else has!" Shiftry spoke up, "No... Team Go-Getters is right! As Rescue Teams, we're supposed to expect the unexpected, no matter where we go!" The crowd started talking again, this time with new hope to their voices. They realized that they weren't thinking straight due to fear, making them forget that they're Rescue Teams and they all have their pride as well. Gengar couldn't believe that words had revived the crowd, causing him to shout, "What are you listening to them for?! You'd willingly go into a hopeless situation?!" Suddenly, someone said, "So says you..." Everyone turned to see Blastoise pushing himself off the ground until he was standing up. "We've only failed once. This isn't the time to be lying around!" Octillery likewise raised herself up and said, "Yes, enough of wallowing in woe-is-me self-pity." Golem also stood up and replied, "If we give up now, that's how it ends. Not for me." All around, the teams were filled with more courage and pride than a few minutes ago. They could see now that the best way to conquer the Magma Cavern would be for all of the Rescue Teams to tackle it and work together. Gengar growled and, heading out, shouted, "Fine, whatever! If you're gonna go, just go! See if I care!"

"Thank you, Team Go-Getters. You stopped us from throwing away the most important thing we have as rescuers- pride. My thanks from all of us," Blastoise said gratefully. All the rescue teams faced Blastoise, who said, "Everyone! It's time to get to work! Let's show the world what we Rescue Teams are really all about!" A roar of agreement went up from everyone. They had a plan now; now that they knew they had to work together, they were confident they would be able to conquer the Magma Cavern together.

Several Rescue Teams were chosen from the many to head out and secure a safe meeting place near the Magma Cavern. The rest of the teams stayed behind in order to get any supplies they were going to need and make sure they had any last-minute training done so their moves were in top shape. As one of the teams staying behind, Team Go-Getters made sure to get as much of this done as they could, then they broke up for the night so they could all get a good night's sleep.

That night, as Hareta slept, he was visited by a familiar dream sequence...

**Hareta's Dream**

Hareta looked around to see the familiar glowing colors surrounding him. Unlike previous times, a landscape didn't form around him, but he was still able to stand fine without any ground beneath him. "It's... That dream again," he murmured. He felt Gardevoir's presence begin to form behind him and turned around to see her materialize.

"It's tomorrow, isn't it? That you take to the underground dungeon, the Magma Cavern," she said. "Yeah. They make it sound like one terrible place. I'm a bit nervous if we'll come out okay... But I'm really excited to be going there too!" Hareta said. Gardevoir smiled and said, "That's good to hear. It will help you worry less about the dangers. And I am certain you and your friends will be fine, Hareta. You have my support. Please, go with strength."

"I will. Thank you," Hareta replied. He then asked, "By the way, Gardevoir, do you know? What it's like underground? It just seems like someone or something is at work in the Magma Cavern besides Groudon." Gardevoir shook her head and said, "No... I'm sorry to say... I can't envision it." Hareta smiled and said, "That's okay. I know you wanted to encourage me. I'm happy you wanted to cheer me up. Thank you." Gardevoir smiled back, then it faded as she said, "But... There is one thing that I can foresee. Your role... Is slowly coming to its end." Hareta was confused by what she said. She continued, "You became a Pokemon in order to fulfill a certain role... And that role brought you to this world." Her physical form began to fade somewhat. "Now, that role... Is finally drawing to its conclusion."

Hareta said, "Gardevoir, tell me! What is my role? Why did I become a Pokemon? Why did I lose my memory until I met Ninetales?" Gardevoir said, "When the time comes... I think I can tell you when this adventure is finished. Please, be patient. Au revoir..." She then faded away, as darkness began to cover the area...

**End of dream**

Hareta's eyes opened to the sunlight coming in through the windows. After doing a few stretches, he got his scarves, hat, arm bracelet, and the toolbox. He then walked outside to find Charmander and Chikorita waiting for him.

"Good morning, Hareta! Did you sleep well?" Chikorita asked. Hareta nodded, and Charmander then said, "OK, this is it! The other Rescue Teams are ready to head out for the Magma Cavern, and our other team members are ready as well. So let's get going!" With that, they began to walk down the path.

After meeting up with Absol, Pikachu, Smeargle, Pichu, and Raichu, they headed off to meet up with the other Rescue Teams. As they walked, Hareta thought to himself, "_Gardevoir said she'd tell me everything when this adventure is finished... Is going underground the adventure she meant? If we rescue Team ACT, will she tell me the truth?_"

He, along with the others, were broken out of what they were doing by a loud, "HEY!" After calming their beating hearts, they looked ahead to see Blastoise waiting with the other Rescue Teams near the path leading out to the wilderness. "You made it, Team Go-Getters! Are you ready to conquer the Magma Cavern?" he asked. Hareta winked and said, "You know it! C'mon, guys, let's go!" Everyone agreed with him, and the whole Rescue Team group set out for the Magma Cavern.

Meanwhile, at the Wild Plains...

Near the edge of the small meadow area, Ekans of Team Meanies lifted himself off the ground and slid towards the center of the meadow. Nestled against the rock there were Medicham, who was meditating, and Gengar, who was simply sitting next to Medicham, though he looked like he had something on his mind. Ekans slithered over to them, catching Gengar's attention since he asked, "What is it, Ekans?" Medicham peeped an eye open, showing that she was listening as Ekans said, "I think all those Rescue Teams are headed out to the Magma Cavern now. I heard footsteps coming from the crossroads that lead out to the plains." Medicham shrugged, "Eh, big deal. They didn't ask for our help, so it's their problem. We've got missions we can tend to, we're not desperate." As Ekans and Medicham continued talking, Gengar's face was beginning to twitch all over, showing he was trying to come to a decision.

"But if we did show up, we could show that we can handle whatever any of those teams can. We'd get more good missions if other Rescue Teams knew what Team Meanies can do," Ekans was saying. Before Medicham could respond, Gengar shot to his feet and yelled, "ALRIGHT, ENOUGH ALREADY!!" They both looked at him surprised, noticing that he was getting their toolbox on over his shoulder. "Well, come on, you two! We're off to crash the party at Magma Cavern!" Medicham and Ekans were confused by his sudden statement, Ekans asking, "Why?" Gengar said, "To show them never to undermine Team Meanies' strength, of course! Show them the driving force they're missing by not calling for us!" Although they wondered if it was for some other reason, Medicham and Ekans still agreed to go help, so they got up and Team Meanies headed off towards the Magma Cavern to catch up with the other teams.

In the back of his mind, Gengar thought, "_And to make sure that Hareta and his buddies get out of this mess alright._"

* * *

Music:

Pride of a Rescue Team- Reset ~Thank You Version~ (Okami)

Setting Out For Magma Cavern- Internet (Megaman Battle Network 2)

Gengar's Decision- Transmission Theme (Megaman Network Transmission)

25. Assault on the Magma Cavern

Deep in the Magma Cavern Pit

"Psychic!" Alakazam shouted, his eyes glowing blue as well as the large Pokemon in front of him. The Pokemon was much taller than Alakazam, yet it was held still due to the power of Alakazam's mind. After enduring damage for several moments, it broke free and roared in anger. It then disappeared into one of the many lava falls in the chamber the two were in. "Grr... Groudon is indeed strong, and its anger is making it that much harder to calm... But I must not give up! I must do whatever it takes to stop Groudon!" Alakazam declared, keeping a sharp eye out for anything that would give away Groudon's position.

High up near the ceiling of the chamber, out of the reach of Alakazam's psychic abilities and higher than Groudon at its full height, Faust was perched on the wall watching the battle. He sneered, "Well, I'm rather surprised that Alakazam has it in him to keep going after so long. He sure doesn't look it, no matter what anyone says about him." He smirked to himself as he said, "Oh well, he's too far along in his battle to be any hindrance to me. Whether he succeeds or fails, it doesn't matter. Hareta's on his way now, not much farther from the cavern entrance. Alakazam is no longer any use to me." As he stood up and walked away, he thought, "_Everything's all set. He'll come down here to rescue Alakazam. He couldn't stand to do otherwise. Too bad for him that nobody is going to be able to come to his rescue._"

Later, near the entrance to Magma Cavern

As the sun shone high in the early afternoon sky, Team Go-Getters, the other Rescue Teams, and several of the Pokemon from Pokemon Square arrived at the Magma Cavern. Here, they met up with the Rescue Teams who had left early to secure a safe meeting place. While Blastoise, Octillery, and Golem were talking with these teams, Team Go-Getters, Pichu, Pikachu, and Raichu were looking at the entrance to Magma Cavern.

"Man, look at the streams of lava coming out of those rocks," Hareta commented, noting that the ground near the entrance was comprised of just stones with cracks in between them for the lava to flow through, which led back into the cave. "Yeah. That means it's going to be scorching hot in there. Maybe even hotter than Mt. Blaze," Chikorita agreed, remembering that they went east past Mt. Blaze to get here. "Big Brother never really told me much about the Magma Cavern after Team ACT got back from their rescue here. Guess we'll just have to figure it out on our own, huh?" Charmander said, and Hareta, Chikorita, and Absol agreed.

Pichu came over to Hareta and said, "It sure was a long way, but we finally made it here, huh, Squirtle?" Hareta nodded, then Absol said, "Well, we did take a bit of time since you occasionally had trouble with some of the places we walked through, but yes, it was quite the road to get out here." Pichu sweated a bit, remembering that he indeed have some trouble along the way, but knowing that he did a lot better than he did back at Sinister Cave. Pikachu, Raichu, and Team Go-Getters reassured him that he was going to do fine here.

When they were done talking, Blastoise, Octillery, Golem, and the Rescue Teams they were talking to merged with the other teams in order to prepare for the endeavor.

"We may not have been able to make it last time, but with our pride and teamwork, we will surely prevail this time," Blastoise murmured to himself. He then announced while looking at the Magma Cavern, "Alright, Rescue Teams! Our mission is simple! Team ACT is somewhere deep in the Magma Cavern and they need our help to get out of there alive! Their chance of coming back alive rides on us! Is everyone ready?"

"Mmm... Juf a mimute!" Hareta called, sounding like he had something in his mouth. Blastoise turned to see that his mouth was stuffed with a sandwich and a rice ball, and he had an apple and a rice ball in his hands too. "Huh?" Blastoise asked, bewildered by this sight. He then realized that the Rescue Teams had set up a picnic blanket and everyone was eating lunch! "How can you eat now?!" Blastoise exclaimed. Hareta swallowed the food in his mouth and said, "We need to eat sometime, and we're not going to have that chance while we're in the Magma Cavern. Besides, the energy will be helpful to us!" His friends and the other Rescue Teams agreed, while Blastoise still looked a bit skeptical.

Suddenly, Team Meanies appeared and caught sight of what was going on. "What are they doing?" Medicham asked her teammates. "They're having food... I want some food too!" Ekans replied. "Well, you will in a minute," Gengar replied, walking towards the little picnic with Medicham and Ekans behind him. "Hey, what's with all of you? What do you think this is, a chance to enjoy the weather? You don't just decide to eat in front of Magma Cavern!" Gengar demanded. Hareta suddenly piped up, "Hey! You guys want anything to eat?" As he spoke, he, Charmander, and Chikorita were each holding a plate, each one with a different food item on them. Although they seemed a bit surprised at this, Team Meanies heartily accepted the offer and began to chow down with all of the other Pokemon. Blastoise couldn't believe this, shouting, "What are you feeding them for?!" Absol looked at him and said, "The question is, are you going to join in or leave more for the rest of us?" After a moment, Blastoise gave in and joined the other Pokemon for lunch.

As they ate and talked, Faust was keeping an eye on them from deep within the Magma Cavern. "So, that pathetic ghost seems to have gone traitor, eh? Well, that's okay. I don't need him anymore. They might as well enjoy their meal while it lasts. Come fully prepared if they so desire. They may beat Groudon, but they stand no chance against me," he murmured.

Later...

Empty plates and plastic containers littered the whole picnic blanket. Every bit of food that had been saved just for the picnic was eaten and all the Pokemon felt very content with their meal. "And now..." Hareta began, stopping when he thought something was behind him, "let's go!" Suddenly, he whipped around and blasted a Nidoking with his Water Gun! The Nidoking did not like this one bit and took off running back towards the entrance to the Magma Cavern.

As the Nidoking stopped just inside the entrance, he suddenly noticed that all the Pokemon were coming toward him and he took off deeper into the cave! As all the Rescue Teams made it inside, Blastoise announced, "We split into three groups with me, Octillery, and Golem leading! Team Go-Getters, their friends, and Team Meanies, you're with me! Go, teams!" With that announcement, the teams all broke up into even-sized groups and each headed off in a different direction into the Magma Cavern. "Here we go!" Hareta called, he and his friends launching their attacks at a group of Pokemon that showed up to attack them. "C'mon, Meanies! We can't let Team Go-Getters take all the glory! Let's show them how it's done!" Gengar said to Medicham and Ekans. Medicham and Ekans agreed, and they all began to pitch in, both with battling and navigating the cave.

As they worked their way deeper into the Magma Cavern, the three groups encountered many Pokemon that were determined to stop them, some that Blastoise, Octillery, and Golem remembered. They encountered groups of Nidoking and Nidoqueen, all of them working together to bring the groups down, several Sandslash that tried to confuse them with their burrowing abilities, and various other Pokemon such as Onix, Magmar, Rhydon, Mawile, and Magcargo, all of them seeming to be enraged at them. Still, the groups prevailed, navigating the rocky paths deeper into the caves. As they battled, Team Go-Getters noted that their eyes were similar to both Skarmory's and Tangrowth's, which indicated that Faust must be behind this.

After quite a while of battling through the cave, Blastoise's group came across a small room with a Kangaskhan Rock, indicating it was a good place to take a quick rest. While everyone else stayed together near the rock, Team Meanies moved off closer to the way they had just come.

"This has actually gone better than I thought it would. I'm definitely feeling stronger from all the battling we've been doing," Ekans commented. "Of course! We can't fall behind Team Go-Getters, so this is perfect for us. And it's not like we've just been hanging back the whole time, after all," Gengar said. "Yeah, that's true. Still, that Squirtle kid... I mean, what's the deal with him?" Medicham asked. "What do you mean?" Gengar asked. "Well, he's a nice kid and he's tough, I'm not denying that. But he's got a weird name, he dresses kind of funny, and I've got my own ideas about that hair," Medicham explained. "His hair?" Ekans asked. "Yeah, I've never seen a Squirtle with hair before. I can't help but wonder if it's a..." Medicham trailed off. "Could be. He'd probably get mad if you asked though. Maybe you should leave that alone for now," Gengar said, and Medicham decided to do so.

Due to his better hearing, Hareta happened to catch most of the conversation, seeing as he, Charmander, Chikorita, Smeargle and Absol were sitting close to the entrance to the room. When he heard Team Meanies coming back, he wandered over into their path, causing them to stop. "What do you want?" Gengar demanded. "I overheard something interesting," Hareta said. "Yeah? What?" Ekans asked. "Can I just say something real quick?" Hareta asked. "What?" Medicham asked, getting a bit agitated. Hareta took his hat off and pointed to his head, saying, "This is real hair, okay? It grew out of my head." Team Meanies looked a bit surprised, but Medicham said, "O-of course it is! As if there was any

doubt!" Hareta placed his hat back on and went back to join the others, shortly followed by Team Meanies, who were wondering how he knew.

After resting for a few minutes, the group gathered up their supplies and proceeded into the Magma Cavern Pit. It seems most of the Pokemon preferred to stay on the upper floors, as they only encountered a rare Onix or Steelix as they proceeded deeper into the depths of the cave.

Eventually, they found themselves at the beginning of a straight passage that seemed to slant down the further it went. "Let's see... Where are now?" Hareta wondered out loud. "Well, I'm certain we've come quite far already," Smeargle said. "Of course we have. You still remember how much effort it took to get down here, don't you?" Medicham asked. Before anyone could say anything, an earthquake suddenly started up! Everyone braced themselves against the walls of the cave for support until it died down.

Once the ground settled down, Absol looked around a bit to make sure everyone was okay, then spotted something further ahead that surprised him. "Hey! Look over there!" he called to the others, and they looked ahead to see Charizard and Tyranitar of Team ACT collapsed on the ground! Absol headed towards them, followed by Team Go-Getters, Pikachu, Pichu, Raichu, and Blastoise, with Team Meanies staying close to the back for now.

Charizard groaned as they approached, managing to raise his face up somewhat. "What happened, Big Brother?" Charmander asked. "Ugh... We challenged Groudon... So angry... Wiped us out..." Charizard managed to get out. "Grrgh... We... It crushed us..." Tyranitar groaned, also lifting his head up. Hareta looked around and then asked, "Hey, where's Alakazam? Did something happen to him?" Tyranitar raised a hand to point and said, "No... He's still battling Groudon..." Chikorita looked at her teammates and said, "We've got to hurry! Alakazam needs all the help he can get!" The others nodded and Team Go-Getters hurried ahead, followed shortly by Team Meanies, who quickly ran to avoid letting Charizard and Tyranitar see them. "Keep an eye on those three! I'll join you when the other Rescue Teams get here!" Blastoise called, then began to tend to Charizard and Tyranitar's wounds. Charizard managed to call out, "...Be careful!"

Soon, the two Rescue Teams arrived at the end of the Magma Cavern, which was a large room with a single large rock that the trail emptied out on, with a considerable space between the edges and the walls, which allowed for a surrounding of lava at the bottom fueled by the lava falls coming from the walls. In front of them was Alakazam, who seemed to be focused on the wall in front of him. "Alakazam! Are you okay?!" Pikachu called. Alakazam briefly glanced behind him, only seeing Team Go-Getters, and said, "Hm! So you have come!" The room suddenly shook slightly, and Alakazam called, "Stay back! This opponent is no laughing matter!" The room continued to slightly shake, and a brief flash of red appeared, followed by a roaring sound. "H-here it comes!" Alakazam called. Suddenly, a bright flash appeared, and Alakazam yelled, "Wraaaaaaah!" When the flash died down, Ekans looked behind him to see something had thrown Alakazam all the way behind Team Meanies. "Oh man, it looks like

he's down for the count!" Ekans said. "Then Groudon will be coming after us next," Absol said. "We've got to try to hold him off until everyone else can get here!" Hareta said. His teammates agreed, as did a somewhat worried Team Meanies. Suddenly, Groudon emerged from the lava fall near where Alakazam had been looking at moments before.

As soon as Groudon appeared, it attempted to bury everyone with a Rock Slide, but Hareta was able to break it down with his Water Gun, even though the heat weakened it. Once those were out of the way, they all attempted to attack Groudon, but it was clear why Team ACT were unable to defeat Groudon. It's outer armor was extremely durable, able to take the single hits they all launched at it. Groudon then used its claws and strong special attacks to leave everyone badly hurt. "There's gotta be some way we can hurt this guy," Hareta growled. "Maybe if we all try attacking all at once, we can break through his armor," Charmander suggested.

Suddenly, someone said, "That's not going to be enough. But we can help you bring it down!" Everyone turned to see that the other Rescue Teams had just arrived, and they had even healed Team ACT to full health! "So Groudon's too strong to launch an all-out coordinated attack?" Hareta asked. "Right. The armor's too tough for that. We found that out the hard way," Tyranitar explained. "What we need to do is distract it, then strike when its defenses are down," Absol said. "Indeed. The problem is how are we going to distract it?" Alakazam asked. They didn't have much time to ponder this, as Groudon began to charge another attack!

Before the attack could be finished, Gengar suddenly shouted, "Double-Edge!" and went flying towards Groudon. He hit Groudon with enough force to cause it to wobble and stop charging energy. Even though the attack left him a bit hurt, Gengar continued to put more energy into the hit, leaving Groudon unable to defend itself. Everyone saw this and took the opportunity to send out their strongest attacks, resulting in a large explosion that covered the whole chamber in smoke!

Once the smoke cleared, Groudon was nowhere to be found, but Gengar had landed, if somewhat hard, back on the rocky area. While Medicham and Ekans helped him, Alakazam scanned the area to try to locate Groudon. Eventually, he detected Groudon was underneath them, but its anger had seemingly vanished. He concluded that Groudon had calmed down and was currently resting, so everyone cheered that they had been successful!

Suddenly, a tremor began to shake the chamber, so Alakazam ordered everyone to leave immediately, and they were only too happy to agree with the order. The other Rescue Teams headed out, with Team Meanies, Team ACT, and Team Go-Getters following them. As Hareta followed behind his teammates, he suddenly looked up to see a rock falling from the ceiling! It was too big for him to run under it and make it to the other side, so he jumped back to avoid getting flattened. As soon as it hit the ground, the shaking stopped.

Charmander and Chikorita turned around as soon as they heard it land and became worried when they didn't see Hareta behind them. They immediately ran back to the rock and began shouting, hoping he was okay. They were

relieved when they heard he was okay, but knew that this rock had basically trapped him in the chamber, so they called for everyone else to help them.

"Everything all right in there, Hareta?" Alakazam called. "Yeah, I'm okay. But I don't know if I can get past this rock," he replied. "Just hang on. We should have it taken care of in a few minutes," Charizard said. "Okay, I'll wait," Hareta answered back. Suddenly, an eerily familiar voice said, "There is no waiting here!"

Hareta turned around expecting to see Faust, but instead the whole chamber seemed to become darker even though the lava was still flowing. Suddenly, something black appeared on the part of the wall where Groudon had been standing when it had been beaten that was rapidly growing in size. Soon, it appeared to be a black vortex, and it suddenly began to pull Hareta towards it! Hareta fell to the ground, gripping onto the ground to avoid being sucked in.

"You see this, Hareta? Do you know what it is?" Faust asked. Hareta growled, "A Distortion World portal!" He then turned away from it and shouted, "If you think you can beat me Faust, you're sorely mistaken!" Faust sneered, "Courageous words, guardian. But where you're going, they won't do you any good." Suddenly, the pull became too strong and Hareta lost his grip and went flying towards the portal, yelling all the way.

On the other side of the rock, Team ACT, Charmander, Chikorita, Absol, Smeargle, Pikachu, Pichu, Raichu, and all the other Rescue Teams got worried from everything that they had just heard. Absol shouted, "Hareta, what's going on in there?! Are you okay?!" The only reply they got was from Faust, and it was him laughing maniacally...

I was inspired by several Pokemon manga for some of the scenes in this chapter, particularly "Team Galactic's Ultimate Warrior" from Pokemon Diamond and Pearl Adventure! for some of the opening, and "Tears and Emotions-It's the Final Chapter!" from PMD: Ginji's Rescue Team for the Groudon battle.

Hope you enjoyed this chapter. Next chapter might take a little while, but I'll try to make it a good one.

See you next time!

26. Advent of the Guardian

Mt. Freeze: Peak

Ninetales was quietly meditating in her chamber inside Mt. Freeze's peak, when her eyes suddenly opened upon sensing that a gateway had been opened. "I can feel it... Someone has opened a portal to the Distortion World. The only one I know of who could do that is Faust, which means he must've restored enough power in whatever shape he has taken now to

challenge Hareta," she murmured. She turned her head to one of the shelves on the wall, walking over to it. Among some of the objects that were gathered on it was a picture of her and Hareta in his human form, standing in front of a forest with a mountain in the background. Although their time together was short, she still had many fond memories of Hareta and cared very deeply for him.

She placed a paw on the white scarf that was a gift to her and thought, "_Hareta... I don't know what's going on right now, but please don't give up. Don't give into Faust's darkness. No matter what..._"

Hill of the Ancients

Despite staring unblinkingly at the sun, Xatu was perfectly aware of the events going on at the moment, thanks to his psychic powers. "And so, it emerges. The one who was long thought to have been sealed... The one who seeks to ensure the world's destruction... As he is now, only you can stop him Hareta. You must not falter. Prove your courage," he whispered silently.

Magma Cavern Pit

Upon clearing the boulder that had sealed off Groudon's chamber, the Rescue Teams found a purple barrier had been erected around the opening, preventing them from getting inside, even when they all attacked it together. It was somewhat transparent, however, allowing them to see that the whole chamber had become dark and that Hareta had seemingly vanished. Other than that, they could not see anything else that had not been present before. Worried that Faust may have taken Hareta somewhere else, Alakazam ordered all the Rescue Teams to search as far as they could to try to locate them, promising that he would contact Pelipper in order to let everyone else know when Hareta was found, no matter where that might be. While all the other teams exited the cave, Team Go-Getters and Team ACT stayed behind to continue trying to break through the barrier. Team Meanies had also stayed behind, but they were hiding so that Team ACT wouldn't know they were there. As far as they knew, Team ACT still thought they were bad, since Alakazam looked ready to say something to them before the tremor started.

"Argh, I just don't get it! Who is this Faust guy? And why is he after Hareta so badly?" Charizard growled, fiddling with the blue scarf on his neck while Tyranitar tried to smash through the barrier. "I don't know. I've only heard about him in the many legends I know. The only thing known about him is that he was a creature made of Shadow energy and antimatter, and as a result, he was consumed by the darkness of his soul. The legends have no record of whether he is human or Pokémon," Absol said. "Yes, I've heard of those legends too. Still, I wonder why he referred to Hareta as 'guardian,'" Alakazam commented. Absol had some idea of why Faust referred to him as such, but kept it to himself. Charmander and Chikorita, meanwhile, were helping Tyranitar in trying to weaken the barrier while the others were letting their strength recover for another hit, having just tried several minutes ago and not gotten anywhere.

Charmander and Chikorita were getting more and more frantic as time went on, both pleading in their heads, "_Please, Hareta! You've got to be okay! Don't leave us now!_"

The Distortion World

Hareta lay on the ground of one of the many floating pieces of ground in the mysterious Distortion World, having been shaken by the sudden transport by the portal. Soon, he opened his eyes and propped himself up on his hands to look around. He saw the same landscape he had come to know ever since the first time he ended up in the Distortion World: floating pieces of land, plantlike structures that could be solid or disappear upon approach, and an endless, spiraling void leading to who knows where. As he looked around, he wondered where the guardian of the Distortion World, Giratina, was.

He was snapped out of his thoughts when he sensed a familiar dark presence approaching. He turned to where he could feel it from and saw Faust approaching him. He couldn't help but grimace at the sight of Faust. Before, he looked like a regular Honchkrow, except for his pale coloring and his red eyes with red sclera. Now, his whole body had a blue crystalline appearance to it, his sclera having turned red and his eyes a frightening shade of green. His beak had seemingly disappeared, and his feet looked more like blocks of crystal instead of talons. Once he was sufficiently close enough, he stopped and glared down at Hareta, fluttering his wings to stay in place.

"I see you're back," Hareta said, not amused by the situation one bit. "Yes. I'm back to finish what I started near the Frosty Forest. You got lucky last time with your little friends, but here in this pocket area of the Distortion World, they can't save you. It took longer than I had hoped, but the extra power I've saved up is worth it," Faust replied drily. "I should've guessed you'd awaken Groudon and make it go on a rampage," Hareta said. "'Make it?' I had nothing to do with Groudon's anger. It got angry on its own. I just woke it up to lure you, since I know you wouldn't stand by and watch everything get destroyed. My plan all along was to lure you out to Magma Cavern, and once you were properly tenderized, I would step in and finish you myself. It didn't happen as planned, since Team ACT came first, followed by your collection of Rescue Teams, leaving you near full health. But now that you're trapped, that's hardly an issue," Faust explained.

Hareta glared at him and asked, "You got any other tricks I've fallen for yet?" Faust glared back at him and said, "I'm through with tricks for today. Now listen here boy, and listen good. Ever since my creation, I've sought to control everything and crush anyone and anything in my way, but you have been nothing but an ever-growing thorn in my side. Every plan I've thought up has ended with my defeat due to you and your sickening bunch of friends! You've stood in my way far too often. But that all ends today, either with your destruction or your submitting to me! Is that clear?!" Hareta kept his gaze firmly locked on Faust as he said, "Your threats aren't going to scare me into surrender, Faust. Do you really think you can get rid of me?!" Faust sneered, "I don't think I can. I KNOW I can."

Faust then moved his wings to his sides and a glow began to appear where his beak would normally be. Hareta saw it coming and managed to get out of the way by leaping to another piece of land before he got caught in the Shadow Fire, which covered the whole platform he had been standing on. Faust then turned to where he went and fired off several Shadow Waves, Hareta just barely managing to get out of the way of some of them. "You seem a bit jumpy, Hareta. Can't take the heat like you used to?" Faust mocked. Hareta's response was an aerial Ice Beam, launched after he dodged another Shadow Wave. Before it could strike him, Faust seemingly broke down, only to reform safely out of harm's way. "Mwa ha ha! Do you really think this will be like last time? You're going to have to do better than that!" Faust said. He then let out a screech, and suddenly, a Shadow Sky started to rain down!

As Hareta tried to avoid the purple rain and watch for Faust's attacks, he thought, "_At this stage of his power, he's capable of greatly reducing the damage from every Pokémon move. Even a Roar of Time or Spacial Rend wouldn't do much to him! Still, I should try to cause as much damage as I can for now. I have to wait until it's time..._" He quickly shifted into a Rapid Spin to blow off some of the rain as well as dodge a Shadow Rush. "You can't keep this up forever! Just give up now and I'll let you live to cause the world's destruction," Faust yelled. This angered Hareta and he switched to Hydro Pump, blasting Faust with a spray of water from his shell. "How dare you, Hareta! You've gotten my rich, crystalline plumage wet!" Faust yelled. Hareta turned to him and said, "That's not all I'm going to do to that body you've got!" And with that, their battle continued.

Later on...

After trading one blow after another for a while, Hareta was starting to get weak, and it showed. He was covered in various scratches and purple markings from where Faust's attacks managed to hit him. Faust, on the other hand, looked almost no different than when they had started battling. All of a sudden, Faust launched a Shadow Blast at Hareta, sending him flying off the piece of land that he was on, though he thankfully landed in the water that was on one of the perpendicular floating pieces, cushioning his fall somewhat since he didn't fly far. Once he climbed out, he looked up to see Faust floating above him, seeming to be smirking, if his eyes were any indication.

"I must admit, you lasted longer than I expected you to, guardian, considering the absence of your normal abilities. But you know as well as I that your loss was predestined. But I'm not going to make it quick. Oh no. By the time I'm partway through, you'll be begging for me to make it stop! But you spat in my face, and now you're going to pay for it!" Faust said, speaking normally at first, sounding more and more demented as he continued.

He then soared extremely fast towards Hareta and began slashing him with his wings, which were covered in Shadow energy. His strikes were so fast, they left no room for any kind of counter. He also employed several other

Shadow moves as well, but he never let Hareta away from him for even a second.

Although the attacks and strikes were very painful, Hareta continued to hold on, continued to conserve as much of his energy as he could. Suddenly, he began to feel the familiar presence of energy within himself. "_I can feel it! The Aura Overdrive is just about ready! Just a little more..._" After a few more strikes, he opened his eyes as suddenly his body began to glow light blue! As soon as the glow started, Faust stopped attacking out of surprise for a moment, but then tried to go for a finishing blow. That moment was all Hareta needed though, as before Faust could try to finish him, he suddenly brought his feet up and kicked Faust away. As he floated in air, he brought his hands and legs into the fetal position, then suddenly brought them back out as he let out a loud yell as what seemed to be a blue flame enveloped him...

Magma Cavern Pit

Charmander, Chikorita, and Absol were up at the barrier, still trying to break through with no success. No one tried to stop their attempts, as they thought that if Faust had sealed off the chamber, it meant that the chamber must've contained something he didn't want anyone else to get at. Team ACT was considering telling them to stop and try to locate Hareta like the other Rescue Teams were, when Charmander launched a Metal Claw that bounced off the barrier and sent him flying a ways away. He had a soft landing though, as Medicham stepped out of the hiding spot she and her teammates were in to catch him.

Charmander looked up at who caught him, and was a bit surprised to see it was Medicham. "Hey, when did you guys get here?" he asked, noticing Gengar and Ekans behind her as she set him on the ground. "We've been here for a while. We just didn't want to come out while they were here," Gengar said, indicating Team ACT. As he said this, Chikorita, Smeargle, Absol, and Team ACT came over to see what happened, and Alakazam instantly took note of Gengar. "What are you doing here?" he asked Gengar. Gengar looked back at him and said, "I was going to offer to help, just like I did with helping you defeat Groudon." Tyranitar said, "Do you think that excuses you for accusing Hareta? Now, fess up! Why'd you do it?" Ekans said, "He already explained why and Hareta forgave him! Charmander, Chikorita, and Absol can vouch for that."

Before anyone could say anything more on the subject, Charmander said, "Hey... Did anyone else feel that?" Everyone, except Absol, looked confused a moment, before getting the same feeling. Soon, everyone's eyes were drawn back to the barrier, Alakazam moving back over to it to investigate closer. As he looked into the chamber beyond, he suddenly saw something appear on the wall that Groudon had been standing in front of. It had the appearance of a black vortex, and he recognized it, from one of the many texts he had studied, as a Distortion World portal. Suddenly, something seemed to appear in the vortex, and then it was expelled from the portal towards the barrier at high speed! Alakazam backed away, and watched as what he thought was a Honchkrow smashed into the shield and bounced off screeching, followed by a bright blue glowing object that emerged from the portal and smashed the Honchkrow back into the barrier,

this time breaking it! The crystalline Honchkrow went flying past Team Meanies and went skidding across the ground.

The glow encompassing the other object faded away to reveal a more definite shape, that of Hareta! However, he was much changed, yet still the same in some ways. He was surrounded by a bright blue aura, which surrounded him like a flame and gave off a very calming light. His eyes were also covered by this glow, and the hair under his hat had changed from the blue color that his head, arms, and legs were to a raven black, Charmander and Chikorita realizing that it must've changed colors back at Mt. Thunder, but it wasn't fully grown then, so they couldn't tell there was a difference. And underneath the aura surrounding him, his body was glowing a light blue, like it did the first time they encountered Faust near the Frosty Forest.

After recovering from his landing, Faust immediately began to hover again and, enraged at Hareta tricking him, shouted in fury, "Shadow Storm!!" Once again, a tornado made out of Shadow energy appeared and went towards Hareta. Instead of trying to dodge, Hareta dashed at a fast speed towards it, much to everyone's shock. As he neared it, he shouted, "Tsumugari!" as he held out his right hand. Suddenly, a blue sword, somewhat longer than Hareta himself, appeared in his hand, which he used to slice right through the Shadow Storm! As he slowed down, the appearance of the blade became more apparent. The blade was long and narrow, the hilt of the blade seemed to be connected to the handle by an orange ring that had three clouds on it, which seemed to be swirling in a circle, and the center of the handle was a round hole. Despite it being longer than Hareta himself, he was easily holding it in just one hand.

Faust growled, "So you want to make this interesting, do you? Very well!" He then began to growl loudly, and suddenly, the ends of his wings sprouted large katar-like blades! He then flew up and went into a dive towards Hareta, who jumped onto the nearby wall, using it to jump back towards Groudon's chamber, soon followed by Faust. As soon as Faust entered the chamber, Hareta took Tsumugari in both hands and the two began a sword duel. The energy of Tsumugari shone brightly in the darkness of their battleground, while Faust's katars spread darkness wherever they made contact. Hareta did a Spin Attack, whirling around with Tsumugari, which seemed to leave a wave of energy as it spun around. Faust leapt away a fair distance to avoid being hit, then summoned a Shadow Chill, shooting a beam of Shadow ice that crystallized on its path to its target. Hareta leapt over it and used his aura to remain floating in the air. He placed Tsumugari on his back and brought his arms into a "C" shaped position. Quickly, an Aura Sphere began to form, due to him unleashing his aura and the Aura Overdrive. He then fired it at Faust, who was unable to break it with his attacks, causing him to be blown back into a wall. As it turns out, Aura was the only thing that could properly damage Faust in the state he was in.

As the battle continued to range on at close and long range, everyone's eyes were fixated on the battle. They knew that it would take just one move to either win or lose it for either of them. As he watched, Gengar thought, "_He shouldn't have to take on Faust all by himself. And I want a shot at him for threatening me!_" He then slinked off into a wall,

taking advantage of his Ghost-type abilities. Medicham and Ekans were the first to notice he was gone, and the others managed to pry their eyes from the battle to look around as well.

Meanwhile, back on the battlefield, Faust tried to slice at Hareta, who jumped back from the blade. Faust took advantage of this to launch a Shadow Bolt. Hareta slammed Tsumugari into the ground and brought his hands up, concentrating the Aura around him into a shield that repelled the attack. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Gengar sneak out of the wall behind Faust and hold up his hand. Hareta immediately caught on and pushed his hands forward, forcing the Shadow Bolt towards the ground creating an explosion that raised dust. He then removed Tsumugari to place it on his back, then dropped to one knee as he summoned as much Aura to him as he could. Faust saw this as the dust cleared, and realized Hareta was saving up for one last big attack, seeing as he was beginning to get worn out while Hareta was hardly winded at this point. "Not going to happen! Not now!" Faust growled. He flew up and angled the blades on his wings towards Hareta, then went into a dive with the blades in front of him, trying to take out Hareta while he was charging up.

Before he could hit him, he suddenly was thrown off by a Night Shade! Faust turned to see that Gengar had struck him and was leaping to deliver another attack. Before he could, Faust got slightly above him and sent him flying towards the ground with a Shadow Break! "GENGAR!" everyone at the edge shouted. "You dare defy me?! Then I'll destroy you first!!" Faust growled, angered at the thought that a weakling would try to stand up to him. "You hit the wrong guy, Faust! Now watch the power of Aura!" Hareta shouted, in a slightly deeper tone than usual. Faust turned around to see Hareta right up in his face with his arms out in front and slightly apart from each other. "Aura Storm!" Hareta shouted, firing a large beam of Aura at Faust! The attack sent Faust flying into the ceiling, continuing to pound him with Aura energy. "_NO! I never should have taken my eyes off of him!_" Faust screamed in his mind. Eventually, the beam died down and Faust fell from the ceiling, feeling his body begin to fail him. As he fell, Hareta grabbed Tsumugari and, taking it in both hands, charged it with Aura energy and made a finishing blow on Faust, zooming above him and slamming down through him with the blade before pulling the sword out and landing back on the ground! That was it for Faust, as the energy caused his body to start turning black, starting with the lower part of his body. As his main body began to turn dark, he opened his eyes, full of hatred, and focused on Hareta who was beneath him, standing on the ground. He spoke, his voice seething with venom, "You will pay for this, Hareta! Mark my words!! YOU... WILL... PAY!!!" Afterwards, the rest of his body turned black and suddenly exploded in a shower of Shadow energy.

After Faust's energy dissipated, Hareta closed his eyes as the glow on his body shone brightly. When it faded, the aura and glow surrounding him had vanished, while his hair had returned to being blue. He then whispered, "Thank you, Tsumugari." The sword in his hand then vanished. He remained silent for a few moments as everyone then came over, congratulating Hareta on his victory. He soon smiled, though, then looked around and noticed Team Meanies was gone. "What happened to Team Meanies?" he asked. "Oh. I think they slipped away while that glow was

encompassing you," Alakazam said. "Knowing them, they're probably up to whatever their old tricks are," Charizard said. "I doubt it. Not after what Gengar did," Hareta said, and his teammates agreed with him. "At any rate, we should probably get out of here now. That darkness is gone, but I don't think this is a good place to stay right now," Tyranitar suggested. Everyone agreed, and they began making their way back to the entrance. On the way, Alakazam used his Psychic powers to contact the Pelipper Post Office and tell them to let everyone know Hareta was found and that he was alright.

Some ways away from Magma Cavern

Team Meanies, having taken advantage of the glow that covered the chamber after Hareta defeated Faust to get away, finally stopped running to catch their breath. They ran because they didn't want to have to answer to Alakazam and force Team Go-Getters to stand up for them. So they decided to get away for now and leave that for another time.

"Good thing we got out of there quick. Last thing I wanted us to go through after watching that fight was to listen to Alakazam hound us," Gengar sighed, rubbing some Oran Berry juice on the spot where Faust had hit him, trying to get it to heal a bit faster. "Yeah, but man was that an amazing battle! Never knew the kid had anything like that in him!" Ekans exclaimed, impressed. "Yeah, I'd have to agree with you. I wonder how he got to have whatever those abilities were. And that was some blade he used," Medicham agreed. "No doubt. But we'd better get away from here. They're bound to get out of there any minute, and Team ACT is probably not going to be happy when they see us. I'm feeling better, so let's get out of here," Gengar said. His teammates thought it was a good idea, so they headed back in the general direction of Pokémon Square.

North of Pokémon Square, near the Cave Area

A lone Lucario stood on the rocks near a cave entrance, his arms crossed over his chest as he faced the green plains. His eyes were closed, his Aura sensing abilities wandering far over the land as he searched. He had sensed a spike of Aura and Shadow energy somewhere, and had been trying to locate the source. He finally pinpointed the location, seeing that it was within the Magma Cavern. He then opened his eyes and gazed out across the plains as he said, "Hareta... You're still the strongest, buddy. Stay strong, so that we may see you again soon." He then looked skyward for a few moments, then leapt down from the rocks and returned to join his friends in the cave they were currently staying in.

* * *

This one took a little while to get up because I had schoolwork to deal with. Next one might take a little while since I have a big writing project coming up, but I'll try to write when I have a chance.

Some music I thought worked for this chapter:

Feelings of Foreboding- Setting Sun (Okami)

Faust's Speech- Distortion World (Pokémon Platinum)

Battle in the Distortion World- Mephiles Phase 2 (Sonic the Hedgehog (2006))

The Guardian Emerges- Okami Shiranui (Okami)

Guardian vs. Darkness- Solaris Phase 2 (Sonic the Hedgehog (2006))

Leaving Triumphant- Results (Sonic the Hedgehog (2006))

Sorry about the wait! Hope you enjoyed!

27. Revelation and Resolve

Several days have passed since the events that took place at Magma Cavern, and Team Go-Getters and Team ACT are just a short ways away from Pokemon Square. During this time, everyone noticed that Charmander and Chikorita had gotten a bit clingy towards Hareta, especially Chikorita. She always seemed to be right next to him, which had Hareta really confused on why she was doing it. Absol and Team ACT had a hunch that they knew why this was, but decided not to mention anything on the matter to anyone. They made good time getting through Lapis Cave and the surrounding areas, and soon found themselves at the crossroads just outside of Pokemon Square.

Meanwhile, in Pokemon Square...

"Are Team Go-Getters and Team ACT almost here yet?" Lombre asked. Pikachu, who was standing next to the counter of the Felicity Bank, called, "There they are! Here they come now!" Everyone who had gathered near him looked as well, and Octillery said, "It's true, darlings!" Lombre nodded and said, "Let's go!" The group walked into the town center, along with the other Pokemon in town and the other Rescue Teams as Team Go-Getters entered with Team ACT right behind them.

"Great work! Good job, Hareta!" Shiftry exclaimed. "We all took care of Groudon, but you took care of that Faust guy?" Golem asked. "Darlings, it's fantastic! You have won me over, let me tell you!" Octillery said, which made Chikorita a bit jealous, since she didn't know what Octillery meant by that. "Whoa, hey! Wait a second! Did Pelipper really tell everyone about Hareta's battle with Faust already?" Charmander asked. "Yeah! He said Alakazam said we could all return, then he spread an extra edition of Pokemon News with all of the details," Pichu said. "You're full of surprises, Hareta, and your team as a whole became much stronger than I expected!" Shiftry said. "You've got a lot to be proud of, kids!" Golem said. "You lot did great! Why don't we team up sometime for a tough mission? Ga ha ha ha!" Blastoise laughed, sincerely meaning what he said though. "You've earned everyone's respect now. Team Go-Getters is truly a first-class Rescue Team. You can take pride in that, Hareta, Charmander, Chikorita, Smeargle, and Absol!" Alakazam said. They knew he was right, but each of them also knew not to let that get to their heads... Too much! "Never would've thought that a demon could be taken down by such a

little guy though! Ga ha ha ha!" Blastoise laughed wholeheartedly, and everyone echoed it.

Suddenly, a strange light seemed to flash in the square, causing Lombre to ask, "Huh? What was that? I thought I heard a voice for just a moment... Did I maybe imagine it?" Everyone looked around, then suddenly they saw it again, and Raichu said, "No. I heard it too." Octillery nodded and added, "Me too. Even now, I can hear it..." Golem asked, "Someone talking to us? Can't say..." Everyone looked around some more until it flashed again and Charmander said, "Wait... This voice... I know I've heard it somewhere before." His teammates listened carefully too, and then Chikorita said, "You're right! Back on the Hill of the Ancients!" Hareta concluded, "It's Xatu talking!" Alakazam said, "Xatu? That's it! Xatu is calling out to us by using telepathy!"

With the next flash, everyone could hear Xatu clearly. He spoke, "To all Pokemon! Calling all Pokemon! Terrible, it is! From the sky... Falls a star... From the sky! Comes a star! It is enormous! A giant of a star! The star, it falls. Straight to us." At the Hill of the Ancients, he gazed skyward, where the fiery, glowing ball that was the star was streaking towards the ground from space! "Disasters in nature... There have been many... The balance of the world, it has been upset... All because of the star. The star that comes slowly closer, summoned by the Shadow creation. If it continues on its course... It will crash through the atmosphere, into this world. It shall be terrible. Something must be done..."

Back at Pokemon Square, Alakazam spoke, "Tell us, Xatu. Is it possible to stop the falling star? Xatu was silent for a moment, as if considering, then spoke, "There is a way. To prevent the collision, there is but one solution. You must ask Rayquaza." Blastoise asked, "Rayquaza? What might that be?" Xatu spoke, "A Pokemon that lives far above us in the sky. A Legendary, it is. Rayquaza must be asked to destroy the star from the sky. However... Far, far up in the sky, in the ozone layer, lives Rayquaza. Known by few and seen by none." Alakazam spoke, "The sky... How are we to go there?" Xatu replied, "Alakazam and I amplify our Teleport together. To send Pokemon to the sky. However... It is a world above the clouds. What will become of the Pokemon sent to the sky? Even I cannot guess."

Hareta spoke up, "Then we'll go! We'll do it!" Charmander, Chikorita, Absol, and Smeargle backed up his answer affirmatively. Team ACT seemed surprised by this, even though they expected it, and Alakazam said, "I also... I mean, I thought there would be others, but you... But... Are you sure? There's no telling what would await you in the world above the clouds." Charmander spoke, "Anyone would expect there to be danger! But it's my wish that all Pokemon can live in peace." Xatu spoke, "Team Go-Getters. Do you hear? Discuss we will, Alakazam and I, about how our Teleport can amplified. Departure, it is tomorrow. Rest you should until then. Last word. Dangerous will be your adventure, but fail you must not. Surpass yourselves." Chikorita said, "No problem! We'll be fine! We'll get it done, right guys?" Her teammates agreed completely with her. "Very well. I will set out to confer with Xatu. You leave tomorrow morning. Prepare for your journey before then," Alakazam explained. Alakazam then

collected some supplies, then set out for the Great Canyon and the Hill of the Ancients.

While Alakazam began making his way out of the village and towards the desert plains near the canyon, Team Go-Getters spent the rest of the day getting any supplies they needed and putting away any extra or unneeded supplies in storage. Throughout the day, all the Pokemon that were in the square made sure to wish them luck in their journey above the clouds. By early evening, they had collected everything they thought they were going to need and had their best attacks ready for anything. They split up for the night, each going to get a good night's sleep so they would be prepared to leave early tomorrow.

Later that night, at Team Go-Getters Rescue Team Base...

Hareta was sleeping on the familiar rock in the Rescue Team Base, however, something seemed to be wrong. He was slightly balled up on his side, his face seeming to be scrunched in pain.

**Hareta's subconscious**

"...Urgggh... I feel horrible..." In his mind, Hareta was floating in a space similar to his other dreams, but the colors were an eerie purple and black color. "This is a dream... Right...? But why? Why does it hurt so bad...? This has... Never happened before..."

Inside the base

A small, purple mist hovered slightly above Hareta, containing an all too familiar presence. "How do you enjoy it, Hareta? Do you like my Nightmare?" it spoke, with the same voice as Faust! "It's so delightful, watching you squirm in pain! Still, I wonder why you became a Pokemon in the first place... No matter. It doesn't matter to me what you are. I'll make you and all others pay for defying me!" Faust continued to replace the dream within Hareta's mind with horrible sensations, when suddenly he began to sense something. As he looked around the base, a bright light began to form near the roof. "Argh! I can't stand that light! Aaaaaaaah!" he screamed. The purple mist then dispersed as the light situated itself over Hareta, who began to relax and sleep on his back now that Faust was gone, the pain leaving him.

**Hareta's dream**

Hareta opened his eyes to find himself floating amongst the familiar flashing green colors. As he looked, a small landscape began to form around him. A small strip of land with grass covered with stones began to from under him, serving as a place for him to stand. In front of him, water began to form, creating a small spring. And around the spring, rocks began to rise up, a cave entrance appearing behind Hareta and what seemed to be a bridge forming above him on the opposite side. He remembered this place as the Sendoff Spring.

_Hareta sat down at the water's edge and looked around a bit before asking, "Gardevoir?" Soon, she materialized, sitting right next to him.

"Gardevoir... Can you tell me now? How I came to be here?" he asked. She replied, "Yes. The time has come. Why have you come here? I will tell you everything."_

She took a moment to compose her thoughts, then turned to him and spoke, "Hareta, you have... Come to save this world." He let this sink in a moment before asking, "I came to save this world?" Gardevoir nodded and said, "Yes. Some time ago, we learned that a great evil would eventually return and drive this world to extinction. And so we sought a hero. But though we searched, nowhere could we find one who would be worthy enough to take up such a burden. We were becoming discouraged... When Ninetales suggested someone she knew to be chosen as our hero. A human who had fought the darkness before. Hareta... You were the human she asked to be our hero."

Hareta looked dumbfounded for a second, then cried, "Whoa, wait a second! Me? A hero? I may be like an Aura Guardian, but surely I'm not that special?" Gardevoir smiled and said, "Yes. That is what you said when I first met you. You said that there had to be others who would be better to be our hero. Because you were still learning, you said you were not strong enough. But it was not power for mere display that we sought. And that was not the reason Ninetales suggested you. She asked for you because we were searching for one with true courage. She knew you truly possessed courage, Aura abilities or no."

Hareta said, "True courage...? That... I don't think that's what I have. Something more like stubbornness is probably closer to the truth." Gardevoir smiled again and said, "You also said that after we met. After we talked some, you then asked this. You asked that we put you to the test, in order to see whether you were worthy to be our hero or not. And only if you were found to be truly worthy were you be able to truly regain your Aura abilities and have the truth be told. In order to fulfill your role, to start over again in order to prove yourself, Ninetales eventually was sent out and came to you. As per your request, she locked away your human memories, including your name, which would be the key to unlocking them. And you became a Pokemon of your own will to fight alongside your friends, to start all over again and prove your true self. That is how you came to be in this world."

_Hareta was amazed by this, asking, "I... I did that?" Gardevoir nodded and said, "Your courage has been proven. Without question, you bear the title of guardian of the world and the role of saving the world. And that role... Is soon coming to its end." Hareta asked, "You mean stopping the meteor from crashing into this world? That's my role?" Gardevoir said, "Yes. And when that is done, you can return home to your world." Hareta thought about this, seeing that he would go back to being a human again. Then he realized something and said, "But, that means..." Gardevoir said, "Yes. It means you will be parting ways with Charmander and Chikorita." Hareta looked at Gardevoir sadly and asked, "Do I really have to leave?" Gardevoir looked down at Hareta and said, "They both feel great kinship with you, Hareta. And perhaps something beyond that. So, if you were to leave, they would be heartbroken... But there is nothing that can be done. Because there are encounters, there must also be farewells... I myself once had a friend who was beyond value to me. Truly, I cherished

our friendship... But my friend has gone away. It fills me with sadness still, losing my friend... But... I am sure... We will meet again someday."_

Suddenly, there was a flash across Hareta's vision, and he began to look around surprised. He then turned back to Gardevoir and asked, "What was that?" Gardevoir thought a moment, then said, "It appears someone was looking into your dream. But it was only for a moment. It is fine. All that remains in this dream is a feeling of sadness... That Pokemon... I think ran off crying..." Gardevoir looked to the dream sky as a flash began to appear over the dreamscape and said, "It will be morning soon. Au revoir." She then faded away, leaving Hareta alone to ponder her words as he looked into the spring water, seeing his true form reflected within. He kept thinking until the dream began to fade to black and he closed his eyes...

Team Go-Getters' Team Base

Hareta awoke as the sun began to beam down through the windows of the base. It took a little while to raise himself up to a sitting position, remembering his dream from last night and what he had learned. He felt sad about what he had uncovered, though he ultimately resolved not to tell Charmander, Chikorita, or anyone else, as he didn't want them to be sad too. After getting up, he went to get the toolbox and his personal items, then headed out the door. As he stretched a bit in the morning sun, Charmander, Chikorita, and Absol came up the path.

"Good morning, Hareta! Did you sleep well?" Charmander asked, to which Hareta nodded, quietly, but still making it seem like he had nothing on his mind. "Then this is it! We're off to the Great Canyon to be explorers of the sky!" Chikorita chimed. Absol spoke, "Before we go, let's make sure we haven't forgotten anything. Open the toolbox, Hareta." Hareta did as he was told and Absol made a thorough check of the supplies within. They had stocked up on Oran, Pecha, Cheri, Rawst, and Sitrus Berries, Reviver Seeds, Iron Thorns, Silver Spikes, and Max Elixirs. With this check, Absol decided that they would be fine, so they set out for the Great Canyon.

Later, at the Great Canyon...

After crossing the desert plains, Team Go-Getters made their way through the Great Canyon quickly. Having come back several times after returning from Mt. Freeze, they now knew the best spots to climb the canyon in the shortest amount of time. Soon, they found themselves back atop the Hill of the Ancients, where Alakazam and Xatu were waiting.

Alakazam turned around as he heard the team approach and said, "Ah, good of you to come so soon." Suddenly, Xatu let out a "Kwaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!" This made Hareta and the others jump a bit. "What's going on? What is Xatu doing?" Absol asked. "It is almost ready. The Teleport Gem..." Alakazam said. "Teleport Gem?" Charmander asked. After another screech, something began to form in just above Xatu, gathering energy then floating down to rest in his wings. He turned around and said, "It is made. This... This is the Teleport Gem. This will

deliver the four of you to the world of the sky. Accept, Hareta!" Hareta stepped forward and took the gem when Xatu handed it to him. He looked at it, noting that it looked like an emerald, except for the glow it was giving off, making it seem like it was a gem of unlimited power. Holding it in his left hand, he stepped back a bit.

"That was made using the power of psychics," Xatu began. "By me, Alakazam, and... Oh?" Xatu stopped to look around, then said, "A Ghost-type Pokemon. We received help from it. ...Gone away, it seems..." Chikorita looked at Alakazam and asked, "Who could it be?" Alakazam laughed and said, "I'm sure it's just bashful. Let it be." He then put on a serious face and said, "Now... I must ask you this one last time. This journey will be fraught with considerable danger. Will you still go?" Charmander nodded and said, "Of course we will! Only Rayquaza can destroy that falling star, right? If that will bring peace, I know I'll give my life for it! That's my wish." His teammates couldn't help but agree with him.

After agreeing, Hareta looked off to the side and thought, "_Yes... And when that wish comes true... So will what Gardevoir said..._" With his right hand, Hareta pulled out his team badge, remembering the three times they were promoted, finally reaching Gold Rank before they went to Magma Cavern not that long ago. He could still remember many of their missions fondly, glad to be working alongside his friends helping Pokemon. And now it was coming to an end. Closing his eyes a moment after putting the badge away, Hareta thought, "_This will be my last adventure... With Charmander and Chikorita..._" He then opened his eyes and raised his head, his eyes now filled with resolve.

Charmander turned to Hareta and said, "Hareta! Let's get this done!" Hareta nodded, and his teammates gathered around him. "We're counting on you! Go forth and do not falter, no matter how bleak it looks!" Alakazam said. Hareta then held the Teleport Gem in his left hand up, and it began to glow brightly. Soon, the glow encompassed the four members, and then vanished along with them. Alakazam and Xatu turned back to the sky, and, in his mind, Alakazam whispered, "_Our hopes ride on you now, Team Go-Getters. Be brave, and come back in one piece._"

Meanwhile, out of sight on the Hill of the Ancients, a familiar Ghost-type was also looking to the sky. "_I don't want him to go. He's going to leave behind so many friends, and we're all going to be hurt by the fact that he's doing his duty. But... I know he has more resolve than I ever had. I just hope I can see him one last time before he leaves. I would like to know if he thinks of me as a friend too._" With that, Gengar quietly left the Hill of the Ancients, not wanting Alakazam or Xatu to know he was there.

* * *

Looks like the end is near. Can Team Go-Getters stop the meteor from crashing, or is there no hope for the world? Find out next time!

Music:

Everyone's Respect- Pokemon Square (PMD: Red/Blue Rescue Team)

Truth Behind the Disasters- Meteor (Don't know the name of this song; it plays when Xatu talks about the meteor and before leaving for the Sky Tower) (PMD: Red/Blue Rescue Team)

Undying Evil- Seymour's Ambition (Final Fantasy X)

Gardevoir Reveals the Truth- Sheik's Theme (The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time)

Off to the Sky!- Heroic (Pokemon XD: Gale of Darkness)

Peace out, y'all!

28. Armedragon

I'm aware that this chapter is pretty short. But I didn't really want to extend it with a bunch of detail on everything that happened. I hope you understand and can enjoy it anyway.

High up in the sky

Atop a bed of clouds, all was quiet. Suddenly, a white light appeared above these clouds, fading away to reveal Team Go-Getters. Although they were held up a second by the Teleport Gem's power, they soon began to fall! Soon, they all landed on the clouds a little uncomfortably, groaning at the sudden landing.

"Ow... Did I do something wrong with that gem?" Hareta groaned, rubbing his head. "I don't think so. I believe it was supposed to just teleport us. I don't think they exactly knew where the tower was, so they tried to be safe," Absol said, stretching a bit. Charmander sat up and, looking around, asked, "Where are we? Are we at the tower?" Everyone stood up and looked around, Hareta suddenly saying, "Wow! This is cool! We're standing on clouds!" He then knelt down, feeling the clouds with his hands. They felt all puffy and soft, yet they didn't give way when they were standing on them.

Chikorita suddenly noticed a gap in the middle of a cloud floating next to them and looked up. Her eyes widened and she said, "Hey guys! Look up there!" Everyone looked where she was looking and saw a large tower composed entirely of clouds. It almost looked like the funnel of a tornado was frozen in place, since they could see some smaller clouds around certain parts. "Xatu said that Rayquaza lives up at the top of this tower. It's going to be a long climb, but let's do our best, team!" Charmander said. Everyone nodded in agreement, then walked through the hole to begin climbing the tower.

Walking across the clouds that made up the floor of the tower, Team Go-Getters began to climb the winding spiral, noting that there was a lot

more room in the winding path than would normally be found in a tower, which gave them more room to battle in. Occasionally, they were splattered with rain, had the sun shine brightly down on them, or were pelted with hail. As they climbed, they came across a variety of Pokemon, even some that probably shouldn't be living this high up in the sky, such as a group of Forretress, a swarm of Venomoth, and a rather explosive Koffing. Still, they encountered some sky Pokemon as well, such as a quick Altaria, a Scizor that tried to slash Chikorita into a gap in the floor but was stopped by her and her teammates, and quite a few Aerodactyl, which were quite tricky to deal with due to them being so fast and such good fighters at all distances. They also had a few less tricky encounters, such as dealing with a Flygon, a Tropius that attacked quickly thanks to the sun shining down through an open area of the tower, and dealing with Ghost-types that like to sneak up on them through the walls and with their silent footsteps. Still, in spite of these challenges and the slowly decreasing oxygen levels, the four explorers trudged bravely onward.

Just as they were about to reach a room with a Kangaskhan Rock in it, they were suddenly ambushed by a Monster House! It contained mostly Ghost and Psychic-type Pokemon, such as Dusclops, Shuppet, Lunatone, and Solrock, as well as some Bug-type Pokemon like Masquerain and Ledian. "We are the protectors of this tower! If you seek to go after the tower's protector, Rayquaza, then you must get past us first!" A Scizor shouted. Team Go-Getters prepared for a fight, but before it could begin, both Hareta and Absol sensed that time was running out. The meteor was starting to get close, which meant they didn't have any time to waste battling the Pokemon. However, they weren't about to let them get past without a fight. So Absol took matters into his own paws and used a Razor Wind to force the Pokemon blocking the way to scatter. They then ran for the path to the Kangaskhan Rock, hoping to get to the room before the Pokemon could stop them, but they were gaining too fast and grabbed Absol! "Absol!" Hareta cried, turning around, along with Charmander and Chikorita to help him. However, he used Night Slash to create a gap in the clouds between him and the trio. "Go! There's no time to deal with all of them! I'll deal with them as best as I'm able, then join you!" he shouted, knocking the Pokemon that grabbed him off and turning around to battle them. Hareta wanted to go help him, but Charmander grabbed his scarf, telling him not to waste the time Absol gave them, and that Absol would want them to get to the peak. "You're right, Charmander. I'm not fond of leaving Absol behind to fend for himself in a Monster House... But you're right!" And with that, they continued up the winding spiral, stopping briefly to catch their breath at the Kangaskhan Rock before moving on.

Now that they had reached the summit of the tower, the spiral emptied out into a series of rooms on each floor, with stairs made out of clouds allowing them to move from one floor to the next. The rooms were either moderate sized and had a few walkways allowing them to move between them and find the stairs, or they were maze-like, as there would be long passages needing to be followed that could empty out into a room depending on the way they had chosen to go. As they climbed steadily higher, the few Pokemon they encountered were mostly Aerodactyl, Tropius, and Flygon, similar to the ones they had encountered on the lower levels,

though on a few of the floors, they came across a Metagross, a Claydol, and a Salamence as well. Soon, they began to feel a breeze whenever they were getting close to the stairs, indicating the peak was very close. They were able to feel it easily, since the weather wasn't as erratic now that they were above the clouds. On the last floor, they found an exit instead of a staircase, which led out to a walkway that was connected to a staircase that wrapped around part of the tower. From here, they could see nearly the whole world beneath the tower. But they didn't have time to admire the view, especially since when they looked up, they could see a red blot in the sky steadily coming closer. So they hurried up the stairs, finding themselves at the flat area that was the Sky Tower peak.

"Is this it? The top floor?" Charmander wondered as everyone looked around. Suddenly, there was a flash of light and somebody roared, "Who goes there?! Who dares to trespass upon my airspace?!" Everyone looked around a moment, then Hareta said, "That voice... It's gotta be Rayquaza!" The voice spoke again, "Indeed I am. The sky is my domain. Now depart at once!" Chikorita protested, "But we don't have time for that or to argue. We came here because we need your help!" Rayquaza growled, "Never!" Another flash of light appeared, followed by a cry as Rayquaza descended to their view, his green, snake-like dragon form hovering just above the ground. "I am a being of the sky, and you are but denizens of the ground. To each is a world that is destined as their own! Ever since I calmed Groudon and Kyogre, never once I have descended to the ground! And the opposite shall also hold true! Let there be no mercy for those that defy the laws of nature! Prepare for the end!"

With no choice to calm Rayquaza but to battle him, Team Go-Getters leapt in, preparing to use full force to stop him. Rayquaza led off with a Dragon Dance, increasing his speed and attack power. This made it hard to hit him, even with Chikorita's Magical Leaf. Thanks to his long serpentine body, Rayquaza could use his own body to his advantage to confuse them. Both sides attacked with powerful moves, Team Go-Getters using their best and most effective moves against the dragon, while all of Rayquaza's attacks were powerful already. At one point, Rayquaza managed to knock Hareta down and was about to come at him with a Dragon Claw when he was hit by a Razor Wind! It came from Absol, who looked like he had been in quite a fight with the Monster House, but still able to battle. The battle continued much the same way until Hareta suddenly let out a loud yell. Everyone turned to see what was up, and saw that he was unleashing his Aura again, as the blue flame began to surround him again and his hair turned raven black. Opening his now glowing blue eyes, he held out his left arm towards Absol, whose injuries were suddenly completely healed in the blink of an eye! Rayquaza was surprised, but managed to snap back to reality as he saw Hareta running towards him at a fast speed. He flew up when Hareta jumped towards him, suspecting that he was going to use a Tackle attack, but Hareta stopped in midair, hovering, and instead launched an Ice Beam that was laced with Aura energy! This evidently increased its power, as it caused a good section of Rayquaza's body to freeze, which, combined with the cold air, began to slow him down. Hareta then dropped to the ground, where he dropped to one knee and closed his eyes as he began to focus. Suddenly, Charmander, Chikorita, and Absol began to feel his Aura filling them, giving them more strength. Chikorita quickly charged up a Solarbeam, due to the abundance of sun,

and fired it at Rayquaza, noting that it was also laced with Aura energy. The explosion caused Rayquaza to be thrown back a bit, which allowed Charmander to strike with a Metal Claw, leaving a big impact due to the new power it was laced with. Absol then finished up by launching a powered up Thunderbolt at Rayquaza. After this, Hareta opened his eyes and recalled his Aura, the flame vanishing and his hair becoming blue again, while Rayquaza slumped down on the ground, seeming to have been defeated.

As Hareta, Charmander, Chikorita, and Absol looked at the slumping dragon, he suddenly let out a roar, indicating that he was not beat yet, and attempted to make a lunge at the team when suddenly the whole tower began to shake! "Wh-what?! An earthquake?!" Charmander exclaimed. "That can't be! We're on top of clouds!" Chikorita added. Rayquaza remained silent for a moment, then said, "These are shock waves! And they're huge!" Hareta realized what this meant and said, "That's right! I've got it!" He then looked and pointed up, shouting "Rayquaza, look up there!" Rayquaza looked where Hareta was pointing, only to see a large flaming object streaking through the ozone layer and coming at them at an incredible speed! "What is that?!" he cried. "It's a shooting star! And it's enormous! If it continues on its path, it's going to destroy the world!" Absol explained. "That's why we came, Rayquaza. Please, destroy the falling star!" Charmander shouted. Rayquaza looked down at them and said, "So that is why..." Chikorita nodded and said, "Yes! Please, hurry and destroy it!" Rayquaza contemplated a moment, then said, "I will attempt to. But before I do, I need to know your resolve. As it stands, the star has gotten too close to the tower. I'm sure I will be able to destroy it with my Hyper Beam, but if I do, then you would not escape unscathed!" Hareta said, "So?! We came here accepting that was going to happen! As long as the world would be saved!" Rayquaza nodded and said, "Well put!" He then began to gather energy in his mouth, charging up his Hyper Beam. Before unleashing it, he said, "Take charge of your destiny!" He then pointed his head straight up and unleashed his Hyper Beam attack, impacting the front of the star. It began to tremble violently as the beam continued to impact it.

After a few seconds of this, a bright light flashed across Team Go-Getters' vision as the star exploded. The flash from the explosion could be seen for miles back on the ground, some Pokemon wondering if the apocalypse was upon them. Everyone who thought this was sure that anyone who was near the blast couldn't have survived...

Is this really the end of Team Go-Getters? Has the shooting star been destroyed? And if they they survived and saved the world, what will happen to Hareta? Find out next time!

Music:

Tower in the Clouds- Sky Tower (PMD: Red/Blue Rescue Team), Temporal Tower (PMD: EoT/EoD/EoS)

Separation- Sacrifice (PMD: EoT/EoD/EoS)

Running out of Time- Sky Tower Peak (PMD: Red/Blue Rescue Team), Hidden Highland (PMD: EoT/EoD/EoS)

The Green Dragon Strikes- Primal Dialga (PMD:EoT/EoD/EoS), Seymour Omnis (Final Fantasy X)

The End...?- Hero (Chad Kroeger) (For anyone who hasn't heard this before, be warned that while it contains no profanity, some of the lyrics might be a bit strong for younger minds.)

29. Victory Comes Before Loss

Hareta opened his eyes, only to find himself floating in a space filled with stars, their lights twinkling all around him. "This... I remember this place. Right... It's just like back at the Spear Pillar... A massive explosion resulted from everyone attacking Dialga and Palkia, and somehow, I woke up to see Dialga and Palkia had been calmed before I actually woke up. But... This means... The star's explosion swallowed me... And now I'm drifting as a spirit again... What's going to happen now...?" Hareta wondered to himself, looking at the innumerable stars all around him.

Suddenly, a dark purple, almost midnight black, cloud materialized a short distance away from him. Even though the mist had no recognizable shape, Hareta knew very well who it was. "Faust. I'd know it's you anywhere," he said. "That's right, Hareta! So much for wanting to see everyone again! All it took was a massive explosion to put you down! I'd be heartbroken... If I had a heart!" Faust sneered. "That's a lot better than you, pal! If you were caught in an explosion that big, it'd be weeks before you could even become what you are again!" Hareta retorted. "Oh really? Well wise guy, now that you're just a free floating spirit, I can do whatever I want with you, then use your body as a new vessel! And I'll make sure everyone believes you've really gone bad! But first, I'm sealing your spirit away the same way that I was sealed!" Faust growled.

The cloud that composed Faust floated over to Hareta and began to force his body to move through the starry space. Even though he wasn't hurting Hareta, it still felt like a strain for Hareta to be moving like this. "Ah... The blast really weakened me... I can't resist his manipulation like this... But what else can I do?" Hareta thought to himself.

After a few seconds of dragging Hareta, Faust suddenly stopped at the sound of a voice calling, "Hold it right there, pal!" The voice sounded familiar to Hareta, so he tried to see if he could locate the owner. Faust, meanwhile, was floating just above Hareta, looking like he was just floating there, when he was actually looking around for the intruder. "Who dares to tell me what to do?" he growled. "I dare!" the voice said, and they both looked to see that Gengar had appeared amongst the stars near them!

_"Oh look. It's the little coward who abandoned his friend and believes that he can actually win back people's favor if he helps someone he can't

compare to," Faust said drily. "I may be a coward, puff, but not as big a coward as you are. And I know nobody's ever going to forgive me for what I've done, but I can at least show them I'm not all bad. So leave Hareta alone and go dissipate somewhere before I really let you have it this time!" Gengar angrily replied. "Oh yeah? What are you going to do, huh?!" Faust yelled. "This! Thunderbolt!" Gengar shouted, unleashing a blast of electricity from his body. Due to his cloud-like nature, the molecules holding Faust together collected the electricity and he became similar to a thunder cloud. The only difference is that this wasn't very good for Faust, as the electricity began to shock him badly, due to both still being weakened and being unable to protect himself in this state. As the pain became too much to bear, he began to shrink away until the cloud vanished completely._

"Nice going, Gengar. I was getting sick of him the moment he appeared," Hareta said. "Well, that makes two of us, I guess," Gengar said, floating over to Hareta and righting him so he looked like he was sitting. They floated in silence a moment before Hareta said, "Thanks for saving me, Gengar. But how did you know where to find me?" Gengar grinned and said, "Hey, I'm a Ghost-type, remember? If I know there's a free floating spirit out there, I'm on it like a fat kid on a cupcake!" Hareta was trying his hardest to hold back his laughter at this but couldn't and turned over laughing. After he righted himself, Gengar continued, "Besides, I knew something was up last night when I was... In the area of your Team Base. He's not very good at hiding his presence it would seem. So I kept alert just in case he decided to try anything to you. No way you're going to get beat by a total coward like that. Sure, I'm a coward too, but not a big enough one to send a Legendary Pokemon out to weaken you before stepping in myself. Me and my team at least had the guts to confront you and your friends face to face." Hareta looked at him and said, "Yeah, that was one really fun battle we had back then!" He then looked at Gengar seriously and said, "But he's wrong about saying that you're a coward, Gengar." At the Ghost-type's questioning look, Hareta said, "I don't know what he meant about you abandoning a friend, but I know that deep down, you're a really nice guy who's conflicted. And you're also my friend. That's all that matters, as far as I'm concerned." Gengar's eyes went wide as he thought, "He called me 'friend!' He really thinks there's a bond between us? I can't believe it!"

_Gengar shook himself a moment, then said, "You know, I didn't tell you this because I wanted to talk to you a minute, but I'm sure everyone is really worried about you. I can help you get back to your body if you want. You know, so everyone knows you're alright." Hareta replied, "Really? That's so nice of you!" He then floated over to Gengar and hugged the Ghost-type's midsection, saying, "Thank you, Gengar! Thank you so much!" Gengar was surprised by the hug, though it was nice to know that Hareta really did trust him. Blushing a bit, he placed his right arm on Hareta's shell, returning the hug, and said, "Uh... Don't mention it." He then released Hareta and, holding him with Confusion, began to send him back. Hareta waved as he began to vanish, saying, "Bye, Gengar! Be seeing ya!" Soon, he faded completely from view, Gengar looking at where he had been floating a moment before. After a minute, he turned around and decided to head back to the physical realm as well. As he walked, he

thought, "I hope so. I'm gonna miss you almost as much as Charmander and Chikorita are going to..."_

**A bright light appeared in Hareta's vision. Then suddenly...**

"........Hey. ....Hey, can you hear... Snap out of it!" a voice said. Hareta recognized it as Alakazam. As he began to wake up, Hareta could feel the ground beneath him. "_..Huh...? Is this... The Hill of the Ancients?_" He began to stir, as did Charmander, Chikorita, and Absol, who were laying next to him. Soon, they all woke up and began to clear the cobwebs from their heads. "Ah! You've all regained consciousness!" Alakazam said, and everyone around them cheered. As they did, Hareta thought, "_Thanks, Gengar. I knew you weren't such a bad egg after all._" Charmander looked at him and noticed his distant look and wondered, "_I wonder... Did Gengar help all of us get back?_"

Everyone gathered around, Lombre cheering, "Awesome, you're alive! You really had all of us worried!" Octillery added, "You were just incredible!" Pichu cried, "Snivel... I'm so glad you're all okay! It's fantastic!" Charmander looked around and said, "Everyone... Thank you." Absol asked, "But what of the star? What happened to it?" Everyone heard the familiar ear-piercing caw of Xatu and turned to him as he turned around. "Fear not! The star is no more. Though it will not be right away... The unusual disasters shall soon be calmed," Xatu explained. "Really!" Chikorita exclaimed. Turning to her friends, she said, "Then everything worked out guys! We did it! We've won peace!"

And Chikorita's statement could not be more accurate. From the Pokemon that were still in Pokemon Square at the moment to the frozen confines of Frost Village, Frosty Forest, and Mt. Freeze, all the Pokemon around the world could feel that peace had truly come to the world. No longer would they have to live in fear of unusual natural disasters. Life would soon be back to the way it was before the disasters began to occur.

"Yippee! This is the greatest!" Snubbull cheered. "This calls for a celebration!" Tyranitar agreed. "Let me shoot my Hydro Pump to kick things off!" Blastoise said, the shoulders on his shell opening to bring out his water cannons. Lombre panicked when he saw they were pointing towards him and cried, "Whoa, hold on a minute there! Don't point those things at me! Shoot them the other way! The other way!" Shiftry grinned and said, "Don't listen to him!" Charizard, also grinning, said, "Yeah, just let it loose, Blastoise!" Everyone laughed at that. "Y-you've got to be kidding me!" Lombre cried, backing away without noticing that Octillery was sneaking up behind him. Once he backed into her, Octillery grabbed him with her tentacles and said, "I'll secure him so he can't get away!" Alakazam smiled and said, "Oh? Good idea!" At that, everyone except Hareta began to crowd around Lombre to hold him in place so Blastoise would have a sure target. "You can't be serious! No! Don't!" Lombre pleaded while everyone laughed in good fun.

Hareta smiled as he watched this, glad that everyone could be happy without having to worry about natural disasters. He wanted to join in on the fun, but he couldn't forget what Gardevoir had said. So he looked on

with a face that seemed to be one of fond remembrance, as if trying to make sure he could capture the moment in his head forever.

Suddenly, a familiar voice whispered, "Hareta..." He turned to his right and saw Gardevoir appear in front of him. "We owe everything to you, Hareta. You and all of your friends. Peace has once again returned to our world. Thank you for everything. And now... Hareta, your role here has come to an end. It's time to return to your world now. It is time to bid farewell..." Hareta looked up at her, desperate, and asked, "You mean... I have to leave right now?" Suddenly, he felt something strange on his body and looked down to see a glowing spot on the middle of his shell's soft section. Gardevoir, sadness on her face and tears in her eyes, said, "Hareta... I am so sorry for this... To everyone... Please bid farewell..." With that, she vanished from sight. Hareta dropped to his hands and knees, overcome with sadness, the spot on his stomach releasing a small trail of light that went around him, occasionally trying to get back into the spot with no success, soon followed by a second. He could also feel himself beginning to change as well.

After Hareta managed to force himself to stand up, Pikachu turned around to see why he hadn't joined in and was surprised at the two light streams that were circling him. "Oh? Hareta? What's swirling around you?" Pikachu asked, worried. His question caught everyone's attention, Hareta turning his tear-stained face to face everyone, while everyone turned to him. The way he was standing, everybody got a good view of the glowing hole on his shell. Charmander exclaimed, "Hareta...! Your body... What's wrong?!" Suddenly, a bright light engulfed Hareta, and when it faded, he was a glowing blue crystalline-like version of his human form, the spot on his stomach still visible with the streams of light still swirling. His Pecha Scarf, no longer fitting his neck, floated down to his feet as he slumped to his knees. He still had his hat, regular scarf, and bracelet on though.

He looked up, his tears appearing brighter than the rest of his slightly translucent body, and said, "Charmander, Chikorita, Absol, everyone... I'm sorry, but I have to leave." This, as expected, sent a large shock through everyone, causing them to voice their disbelief. "Everyone... Thank you for everything all this time..." Hareta said, his eyes falling on the ground again. Chikorita asked, "Leave...? Wh-what do you mean, leave?" He looked back up and said, "My role as a Pokemon has ended, so now I have to return to my world." Alakazam, just as shocked as everyone else, could only say, "Unbelievable!" Tyranitar stuttered, "Go back... To the human world?!" Charmander and Chikorita were standing in front of Hareta, who was still kneeling, at this point, Charmander crying, "I don't understand! Why do you have to leave?! I thought... Aren't we friends, family? Our team?" Hareta moved, his Rescue Team Badge falling from a part of his hard to see clothing, and scooped Charmander and Chikorita up, hugging them tight, saying, "Yes. And you guys always will be my friends and family. I'll never forget all of our time together." Both of them buried themselves in his chest, Chikorita crying, "Don't go, Hareta... Please..." After a bit of this, the light surrounding Hareta and the spot on his midsection began to glow brighter, causing his arms to lose strength. He set Charmander and Chikorita back down, saying, "I'm blessed to have met both of you... And everyone else too..." Charmander,

his face matted with tears as well, said, "But... What are we going to do when you're gone, Hareta?" Hareta, his face covered with tears and trembling violently, dropped to his hands, facing the ground, and said, "I'm so sorry... This is good-bye..."

The swirling lights began to circle him even faster as he began to glow bright, soon surrounded by an aura where the streams went the farthest. Everyone stepped closer, all calling his name, hoping against all hope that this wasn't happening. But as the Aura intensified around him, he suddenly went on his knees, raising his face as several tears flew from his eyes, his form becoming surrounded by a yellow sphere. The sphere lifted off the ground and began to float away from the Hill of the Ancients, everyone following to the cliff edge. As they watched it go, Charmander and Chikorita cried, "HARETA!!! NOOOOOOOOO!!!"

As he moved away from the Hill of the Ancients, Hareta could still see everyone at the edge of the cliff, watching him go. As they faded into the distance, he continued to cry bitter tears of remorse...

* * *

Music:

Faust's Return?- Ganondorf's Theme (The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time)

Friends for Good- Soft Light (Super Paper Mario)

Mission Accomplished- Peace Won (Don't know what this is called), Reset ~"Thank You Version"~ (Okami)

Hareta's Goodbye- Parting (PMD: Red/Blue Rescue Team)

Gone Forever?- Dreams of an Absolution (Lee Brotherton) (Sonic the Hedgehog (2006))

30. Hareta's Promise

Alright, this is it. The final chapter of my story. I tried to capture everything that I possibly could here. Hopefully, you'll agree that I did that. So without further ado...

* * *

The Hill of the Ancients

Only a short amount of time has passed following Hareta's departure, as the setting sun hasn't changed its position much. All the Pokémon are still gathered, all of them still trying to understand why it was necessary for Hareta to leave so suddenly as he did.

"Snivel... Hareta... Why... I don't understand..." Pichu sobbed into his older brother's fur, who was holding him to give him some comfort. Pikachu said nothing, his sadness drowning out any chance of speaking at

the moment. "Why? Why was it necessary to leave us...?" Charizard murmured. "Hareta... He risked his life to save mine... And I never did anything to show my thanks... I never even said 'thank you' to him... Left before I could even say that to him..." Shiftry sobbed. "You're right... Just up and left like that... Why now? Why now, when the world's been saved? Just when things were starting to get better... Sob..." Lombre said, wiping some tears off of his face. Xatu spoke, "This was coming... Our world, it was saved by Hareta. I look back now... When bound for the sky, Hareta seemed... As if resigned. Had the resolve to accept that this would be his fate for saving the world."

Charmander, having said nothing after Hareta left, spoke up, ".....I think I understand now. Hareta... He must have become a Pokémon to save us. And when... When the star was destroyed... Hareta knew that it would be time to leave..." Tears began to well up in his eyes anew as he said, "But why... Why didn't Hareta say something to us before...? If he knew this was coming... Why didn't he tell us?" Alakazam, trying to keep a level look on his face, came over to Charmander, placed a hand on his back, and said, "Those words couldn't be spoken. As much as you, Chikorita, and Absol are heartbroken now, Hareta must've felt the same pain of leaving. Try to understand, Charmander." Charmander, feeling his strength leave him, slumped onto his stomach and, holding on to Hareta's Rescue Team Badge, began sobbing anew, saying, "Hareta..."

Not far away from him, Chikorita was also slumped down near the cliff edge, her face wearing a distant look as tears continued to fall. She knew Charmander was just as upset as she was, maybe even more so. She looked down at Hareta's Pecha Scarf, the only other object he left behind, remembering all their times together. In her mind, she said, "_Why, Hareta? I loved you! I wanted you to be with us forever, to keep carrying on our passion. And I wanted to tell you how I really feel about you. But I never did... And now you're gone..._" Chikorita buried her face in the scarf and began to cry again, deeply saddened by the loss of the one she loved so much.

Absol, who was standing near Xatu, was watching over them with a seemingly stoic look on his face. Although he couldn't bring himself to show it, he was truly saddened by Hareta's departure, never knowing that it would be his fate to leave them once peace had returned. Hareta had truly trusted him; he was his first friend, and now he would never get to see him again... As he thought this, he began to border on crying himself.

Eventually, Xatu told everyone that the sun would be setting in a few hours, so it would be a good time to go home before the canyon became virtually impossible to navigate. Everyone only vaguely heard what he said, not able to pay much attention to him, though they decided they had better leave anyway. As they left, Xatu turned to the sun and whispered, "Hareta... I can sense the conflicting emotions within your heart, even as far as you are. Look deep within yourself and find what it is you truly want before it's too late..."

Somewhere high above the Pokémon world...

The yellow sphere that was surrounding Hareta continued to float upwards, going higher and higher into the sky towards the stars. The sphere was preparing to enter the Distortion World, gathering energy through its ascent to open a new portal. Hareta was sure it was going to take him back to his world; he just wasn't sure where the sphere would be taking him before he got there, though.

As he began to see the stars in the distance, Hareta suddenly heard voices speaking to him. They said, "Your friends are heartbroken... True friends... Friends for life... You truly understand it, but you are conflicted all the same... If you wish for it... And wish very strongly... Perhaps you will meet again." As Hareta heard these words, his thoughts turned to his various memories. Both of his time as a Squirtle and those from before he came to this world...

**Flashback**

"Excuse me," a female voice said, and Squirtle turned in the direction of the owner to see who it was. He saw a Chikorita and the same Charmander he had met earlier entering the doorway of the house. "What kind of weird Squirtle are you? Acting just like a human?" the Chikorita continued. Squirtle climbed out of the water in the house saying, "But wait. I really am a human. I mean I used to be a human..." Chikorita smiled and said, "You really are weird!" Charmander laughed a bit and asked, "So what do you think of our place?" Squirtle answered, "I love your house! It's awesome!" Chikorita looked at him and said, "It's not our house. It's our Team Base."

Squirtle seemed to be confused on what they meant, so Charmander said, "Team Base. For our Pokémon Rescue Team." While he was saying this, he brought out a Rescue Team Badge and tossed it to Squirtle. Squirtle looked at its egg shape, noting that it was silver on top and pink on the bottom, and it had two yellowish wings on the sides. Charmander continued, "And starting today, you're a member of our team, Team Go-Getters." Chikorita added, "We've been looking for a new member." Squirtle looked up at them and asked, "What's a... Rescue Team?" Both Charmander and Chikorita were shocked by this question, Chikorita asking, "You really don't know??" Squirtle muttered, "Me and my big mouth..."

**End flashback. New flashback**

"Hey! Aren't you Hareta?!" a girl with green hair tied back into a long ponytail and clad in a black mini dress with a white undershirt and a short pink skirt, a white beanie, a red scarf, and pink boots called to a boy with wild raven black hair, who was wearing only a pair of ragged shorts. Although he was climbing a tree, he heard her, so the girl continued, "My name is Mitsumi! I'm Professor Rowan's assistant! I have to talk to you about something, Hareta!" At the mention of Professor Rowan, Hareta called, "Really?! You're a friend of Gramps'?!" Unfortunately, he wasn't looking where he was going while he was climbing and slammed face first into a tree. As he groaned, Mitsumi muttered under her breath, "Dummy."

A little later, the two were standing at the edge of Lake Verity, having a conversation. "So you're helping Gramps out, huh?" Hareta asked. He looked at her and then said, "You sure dress funny, though." Mitsumi got a bit steamed at this and yelled, "I don't want to hear that from someone who runs around in raggedy shorts!"

**End flashback.**

These precious memories of first meeting very special people and Pokémon, and all the moments and adventures they shared together continued to run through Hareta's head, all conflicting with his decision of either going home or staying in this world with some of the best and most important friends he had ever met. He missed all of his Pokémon friends from home, as well as his human friends, but he didn't want to leave Charmander and Chikorita heartbroken at him leaving them. Suddenly, a memory flashed across his mind that made him gasp.

**Flashback**

Several days have passed since Team Go-Getters met Ninetales at Mt. Freeze, and, thanks to all their hard work along the way, they were close to Mt. Blaze, standing on the same cliff from the last time they passed through the area. Night was coming, so they decided to stop for the night before resuming their journey home. Once they had set up camp, Hareta went over to the cliff that the team had sat on nearly a week ago when they looked out at Mt. Blaze in the distance. Once again, Hareta sat down and looked out across the winding path that they would be walking tomorrow to get back to Mt. Blaze, still finding the view fantastic. After a minute, Charmander and Chikorita came over to sit beside him while Absol kept an eye on dinner.

After a few moments of silence, Charmander spoke up, "Err, Hareta? You said that since we met with Ninetales that you've been recovering your memories, right? Do you remember anything about why you woke up as a Squirtle?" Hareta answered, "No. I'm remembering a little bit at a time, but even what I have is still fuzzy. It's probably going to be a while until I can remember everything clearly." Chikorita asked, "Well, that's to be expected though, right? You can't expect to remember everything right away." Hareta said, "Yeah, that's true."

_Charmander spoke, "Hareta, I have to know. If you could remember everything clearly, would you want to stay here or go back to your old life? Since I'm sure you've made so many human friends before you woke up here and you wouldn't want them to be sad because you're gone." Hareta looked at him and said, "Charmander, I care for everyone I meet. Even people who do unforgivable things. But my most important friends are Pokémon. I've been close to Pokémon ever since I was a baby. So even if I did want to leave, I know I'd be back so I could see you guys again." Chikorita looked at him and asked, "Really? Even if it meant you wouldn't be able to go home again?" Hareta nodded and said, "I've grown kind of used to being a Pokémon, after all. And you guys are really important to me. If you guys were sad and there was something I could do to make you feel better, I would do it. Because with all we've been through so far, we're more than just teammates and friends. I can't think of the word for

it, but that's what I feel, anyway." Both Charmander and Chikorita stared at him, awestruck by his words._

Absol, who had been listening, smiled to himself as he thought, "He's exactly as legend described him to be. Caring for all, especially Pokémon. And the fact that he would trust me even though we had just met back in the forest... He really is the one that the gods chose to be the world's Guardian." He then called, "Hey guys! Dinner's ready!" This snapped the trio out of their state, so they stood up and began walking over to their campsite. As they walked, Charmander asked, "So if we were feeling sad and there was something you could do, you would seriously do it?" Hareta nodded and said, "You bet. I can promise you that." And with that, the team sat down and dug into their food.

**End flashback**

"_That's right. I made that promise. And I don't intend to go back on it now..._" Hareta thought to himself. Hoping it wasn't too late to make his wish, Hareta spoke, "I don't want to leave... I want to stay longer... With my invaluable... Irreplaceable friends and family..." Suddenly, a light began to cover his vision, so he closed his eyes and waited for whatever was going to happen...

Team Go-Getters Rescue Team Base

Night had just fallen, and everyone had gotten back to Pokémon Square a little while ago. They were still upset over Hareta leaving, so they were gathered in front of the Team Base, as if paying their respects to their departed friend and family member. Charmander and Chikorita were both crying on the path leading to the entrance, with Pikachu, Pichu, Raichu, Absol, and Smeargle standing behind them to keep anyone from getting too close. Not that anyone dared to. They were all still feeling really depressed themselves.

Suddenly, a white light began to shine on the path leading to the village outskirts. It glowed brightly for a few seconds, then suddenly it deposited Hareta in front of it. He was crouched on one knee, back in his Squirtle form and still wearing his hat, scarf, and bracelet. For some reason, he was also wearing a blue jacket that was black at the elbows, as well as being black inside and where the zipper was, going up to the top of the collar. With the collar, the jacket went up to beneath his head and down to his tail.

No one was really concerned with where it came from, though. At first, everyone (except Charmander and Chikorita) was trying to make sure they weren't seeing things first while Hareta got his bearings together. By the time he had, everyone could believe that it was really him, so Absol and Pikachu alerted Charmander and Chikorita. At first, they thought it was a joke, but once they saw him coming towards them and everyone happy, these doubts were cast aside. Suddenly, the three of them broke out running towards each other, ending with Hareta hugging both Charmander and Chikorita while they did the same to him. All the while, they were surrounded by everyone, who were cheering that Hareta was back. Amidst the cheers, Hareta whispered, "I didn't forget the promise I made. And I

didn't want to break it. Not for any destiny in the world." At this point, Charmander and Chikorita didn't care the reason. They were just too happy to have him back. Eventually, Shiftry called, "Now that everybody's here, let's get everybody else and start that celebration!" Everyone cheered for this suggestion, so they headed off towards Pokémon Square to let everyone know the good news. On the way, Charmander and Chikorita gave Hareta his Pecha Scarf and Rescue Team Badge.

Meanwhile, in the bushes

Team Meanies had arrived a few minutes prior to Hareta's return, since Gengar wanted to show up without anyone knowing they were there. As a result, they were as surprised as everyone else was to see Hareta suddenly return. Although they also felt better knowing that he was back and his friends were no longer upset.

As they watched all the Pokémon head towards Pokémon Square, Ekans asked, "What should we do? Maybe Team Go-Getters would want us to show up." Medicham replied, "Mushy. But knowing them, they probably would. What do you think, Gengar?" Gengar shook his head and said, "I wouldn't be surprised, but I'm sure I would ruin the atmosphere, no matter how much they defend me." Having said that, he stood up and began walking away, waving an arm and saying, "You two can go ahead if you want. I'm feeling much too content right now. I'd rather not blow it for me or them by doing something not everyone agrees to." Medicham and Ekans looked at each other, Ekans saying, "I don't know how it happened, but that Hareta kid really changed Gengar, don't you think?" Medicham agreed, saying, "Yeah. But you know what? I think I like him better this way. Don't you?" Ekans nodded, and then they both followed Gengar, preferring not to go to anything big without their leader.

Mt. Freeze: Peak

Ninetales was standing in front of her cave. Like Hareta's other friends, she had been saddened when he had to leave. However, she sensed that he had returned before anyone else did, since the time she had spent with him before all this had allowed her to be able to sense his Aura from far distances. Although this was just one of the things she learned about him, it was the one that made her feel better since it told her he was back.

She walked back inside her cave and once again went over to her shelf to look at the picture of her and Hareta. She remembered that it was taken in a region to the northwest of the Sinnoh region, where he lived back in his world. She was glad that she had met him then. If it weren't for him, she might not have survived to see this day. And it was for that reason that she liked him the way she did. "He's very important to me... And I want to be there for him whenever he needs help. But that time will come later. Right now, I'm just happy that he decided to stay in this world with all of his friends," she whispered to herself.

North of Pokémon Square, near the Cave Area

Near the entrance to a cave, the same Lucario from a few days ago was standing on the rocks again, though with his eyes open and his arms at his sides as he looked out across the plains. Soon, two other Pokémon came up behind him and he turned to see that it was Empoleon and Luxray, two of his friends. He moved over slightly to give the two some room to stand.

Empoleon spoke, "You've been standing there for quite a while, Lucario. Has Hareta returned home yet?" Lucario shook his head and said, "No. I could feel him preparing to go into the Distortion World, but I could also sense that he was conflicted. He didn't want to make his new friends sad about him leaving, so it looks like he decided to stay in this world for a while, since I can sense him in the town of Pokémon Square." Luxray said, "That sure sounds like the Hareta we all know and love. And it looks like we didn't waste our time coming to this world after all, since now we've got a chance of meeting up with him here, right?" Empoleon nodded and said, "Right. But he has just saved this world, so we should let our friend get his rest and make sure everything is okay for now. And we'll keep up the work we've been doing since we came here. Now that we know where he is, we can keep camp here and try to arrange a meeting with him some time." Lucario agreed, "That sounds like a good idea. Should we tell the others?" Luxray said, "Of course. They deserve to know that Hareta has decided to stay here. Let's let everyone know. Typholosion, Misdreavus, Sceptile, Minun, Regigigas... All of them!"

With that, the three turned and headed back into the cave. Empoleon stopped before doing so and looked to the sky. As he did, he thought to himself, "_Hareta... You're my most important friend in the world. More important to me than any other human. Even after all we've been through, I still was extremely worried about you. I hope we meet again soon, and hopefully you'll be able to remember who all of us are._" He then walked back into the cave, following Lucario and Luxray.

Meanwhile...

Back in Pokémon Square, upon hearing that Hareta was back, everyone burst out into a celebratory mood, launching into a festival to celebrate the return of world peace. Fires were lit in the center of the square to allow for lighting, and many activities, such as dancing and games, were arranged, among other things that the Pokémon did. It wasn't often that they had a reason to celebrate outside of the usual holidays, so everyone was especially festive tonight.

Later on in the night, Team Go-Getters decided to take a short break from the festivities for a little while, so they snuck away, heading for the Makuhita Dojo. There, they took a seat at the edge of the waterfall, Absol sitting behind his other teammates and letting them rest against his side. They sat in silence like this for a few minutes, watching the stars that were still hanging high in the sky.

Eventually, Charmander asked, "How did you come back, Hareta?" Hareta said, "While I was up there, I remembered that promise I made a few weeks ago." Charmander responded, "You mentioned that earlier. Which promise was it?" Hareta smiled and said, "I promised that if you guys were

feeling sad and there was something I could do to make you feel better, I would do it. So I wished that I could stay in this world longer with you. Because we're all like a big family, right?" His friends couldn't help but agree with him. As she rested against his side, Chikorita thought, "_I should tell him how I feel about him. But maybe I should wait. He was almost forced to leave us. For now, I'll cherish the time that we're together._" She rubbed against his side a bit at that thought, knowing that even if Hareta didn't know her feelings, they would still be together.

Suddenly, they heard footsteps approaching them, and turned to see it was Pichu, Pikachu, and Raichu. "Hey guys, taking a little break?" Pikachu asked. At Team Go-Getters' nods, Raichu said, "Well, this is certainly a good place to come to relax a little. Nice and quiet here." Pichu said, "I'm glad you came back, Hareta. I really missed you." When he walked over, Hareta gave him a little hug to show that he felt the same way.

After sitting around and enjoying the calm for a little longer, Pikachu stood up and said, "Well, I think I'm ready for another go-around for some dancing and games and talking. Who's with me?" Everyone hopped up, excitedly agreeing. So they headed back towards the town square to party down for the night.

As they headed off, Team Go-Getters wondered what lay in store for them in the future. Now that peace was restored all over the world, there was a bright outlook anywhere they looked. There was still always a chance that something could happen in the future, but they weren't going to worry about that. Because they knew that if something were to happen, they would face it together. They always did, and they wouldn't have it any other way.

* * *

Music:

Mourning At the Hill of the Ancients- Tell Me What the Rain Knows (Wolf's Rain)

Conflict in the Heart- Memories (PMD: EoT/EoD/EoS)

Promise and Return- Credits and Ending (PMD: Red/Blue Rescue Team)

Friends All Over- Mounting the V-Watch (Viewtiful Joe anime)

Celebration and Time Alone- Kamiki Festival (Okami)

Bright Future- Staff Roll/End Credits (Sonic the Hedgehog 3, Mario Kart 64, The Legend of Zelda: Wind Waker, Metroid Prime 3: Corruption) (I couldn't decide on which one worked best. Feel free to suggest which one you think works best or even one that isn't on here, if you want.)

* * *

And with that, that brings my first fanfic to a close. But I've still got other ideas in the works for stories. I'll be updating my profile sometime soon with more details, so you can check that out if you want to know where I'm going next. And I'll have some story ideas there as well, which you can email me to tell me whether you think they're good or if I should bang my head against a table until I forget about them.

At any rate, thanks for reading all this way and I hope you'll keep watching!

End file.